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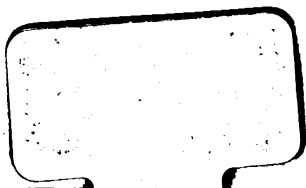
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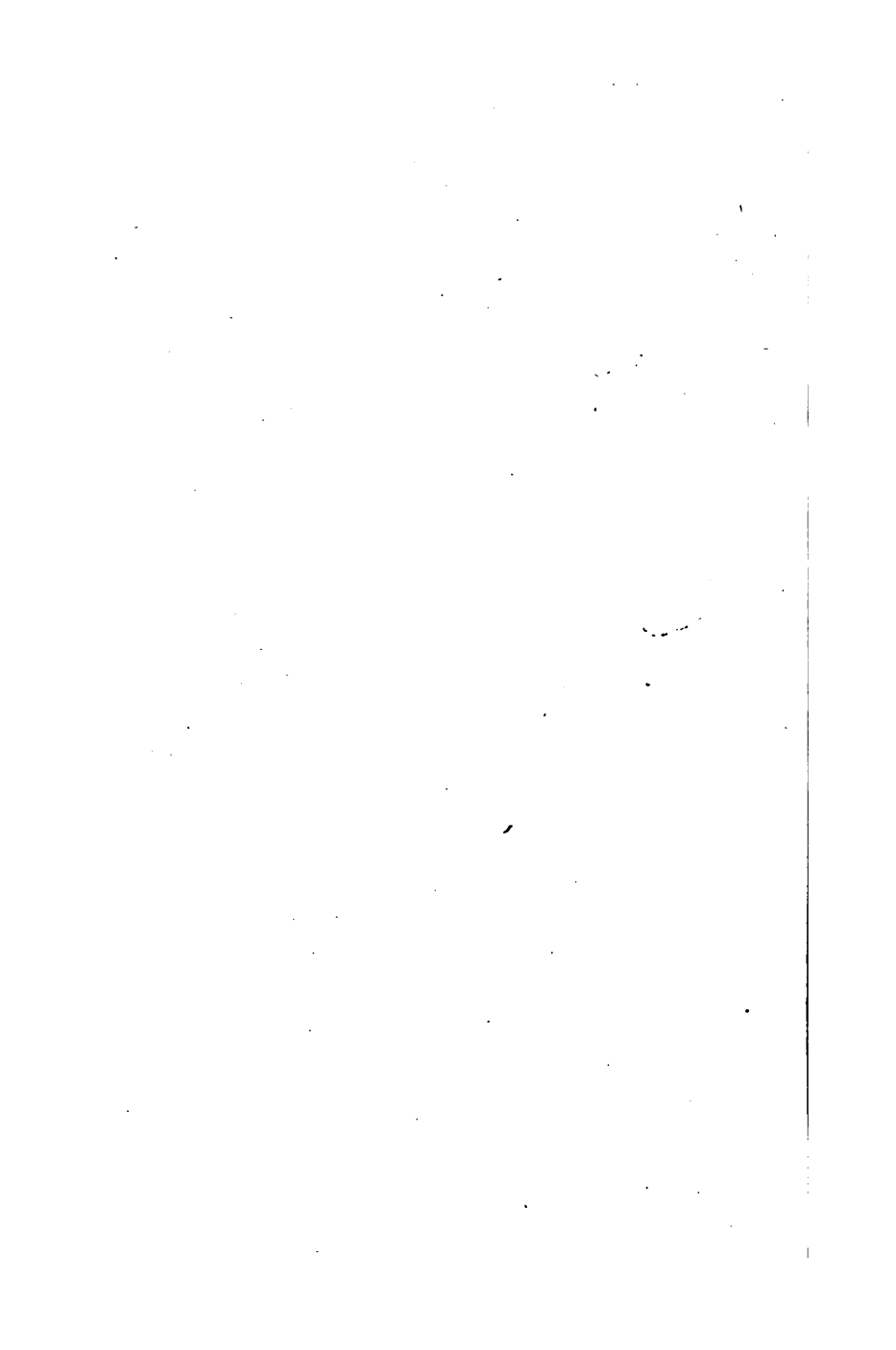
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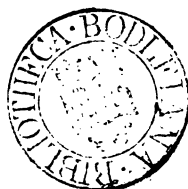
HOLMDALE RECTORY:

ITS EXPERIENCES,

INFLUENCES, AND SURROUNDINGS.

BY

M. A. R.



"Men love us, or they need our love;
Freely they own, or headless prove
The curse of lawless hearts, the joy of self-control."

KEBLE.

L O N D O N :

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HOLMDALE RECTORY.

CHAPTER I.

A HAPPY and loving family were the inmates of Holmdale Rectory.

They consisted of the rector and his wife, one son, and three amiable good-tempered daughters. The rector himself was an honest upright man, one who acted up to his convictions, and feared no one when in the path of duty. He was well to do, for his living was a tolerably good one, and he had some private means to boot; and he was respected and loved by his parishioners, for if not very eloquent as a preacher, yet he spoke from the heart, and, as a natural consequence, reached the hearts of his hearers.

His wife was quiet and sensible, and behaved on all occasions as the rector's wife should do; foremost in good parish works, in which she was assisted gladly and intelligently by her children.

They were all assembled round the dining-table. There were snow and frost without, but in the room all was warm and comfortable; yet a gloom, which was not usually seen there, was upon the brow of the rector.

He was this evening more silent than was his wont. He had no tales to tell of whom he had seen or where he had been that morning; the lively conversation of his girls with their brother seemed to pass him un-

heeded; he ate as if he did not know that he was eating, and probably neither did he know that he uttered not a word. At length Margaret, his eldest daughter, observed,—

“Papa, you have had no wine to-day: let me pour it out for you.”

“No, Margaret; thank you, my child, but I want no wine.”

“Oh, but you always drink it; surely you are not ill, dear papa?” expostulated Margaret, while all the others waited in seeming anxiety for his answer.

“I shall drink no wine to-day, Margaret, and it is much in my mind never to touch a drop of wine again.”

An exclamation of astonishment, in a tone rather of remonstrance, escaped from Mrs. Oakley. But he went on, “You saw that horrid scene last night; you saw an intelligent, gentlemanly, amiable man brought into a condition from which brutes would shrink, all through wine.”

“But, my dear,” cried his wife, “what can you mean by comparing yourself with Captain Archer? You never drink one drop too much; your principles are much too good for that. Never, in all the years that I have known you, have I once seen you drink otherwise than *most* moderately. Pray do not compare yourself with that wretched man.”

“I do not compare myself with him, Eleanor; thank God, I have never felt even *tempted* to the sin of drunkenness; but shall I tell you what is in my heart? If I go to Captain Archer and remonstrate with him, as it is my bounden duty to do, on the sin of which he has been guilty, and which I have reason to fear is becoming a habit with him, will it not tend greatly to strengthen my arguments if I can assure him that neither wine nor any other intoxicating drink is henceforth ever to enter my own lips?”

“Perhaps so,” replied Mrs. Oakley; “yet it seems hard that you are to be punished for another man’s wickedness.”

"Nay, it is not much of a punishment. My health is good. I am as strong, I rather fancy *stronger*, than that boy," looking towards his son; "and I should be just as well without wine for the rest of my life."

Now, all his hearers knew that Mr. Oakley never spoke without deliberation; they felt that his determined resolution was for the future to abstain from the very moderate allowance of wine to which he had been accustomed; yet it seemed so strange a thing, that they could not quite give up a few more words of remonstrance.

"But, papa," began his youngest daughter, "will not people say that you turn teetotaller because you are afraid of getting drunk?"

"Well," and here the rector could not restrain a laugh, "if people are so very foolish and uncharitable, I fear I must e'en bear it; but, my pretty Lucy, did you ever know me to shrink from doing my duty for fear of what 'people' might say?"

"No, indeed, dear papa, and I never shall," exclaimed Lucy; "but I don't like people to say wicked things of you."

"Neither do I, my dear; it does more harm to them than it does to me; but whenever you hear them you can set them right, you know."

"Oh, papa, they are not likely to speak evil of you before me!" cried Lucy. "I only wish they would," she added, brightening with excitement: "I think they would never venture it again."

They all laughed—a kind affectionate laugh, in which there was nothing of ridicule; but the subject was not to drop just yet.

"Papa," said Agnes, Mr. Oakley's second daughter, "don't you consider Miss Hooper a very excellent person?"

"Undoubtedly, my dear," replied her father, with a smile; "but what have you to tell me of Miss Hooper?"

"Only this, papa: it seemed to me rather to the point, or I should not have mentioned it."

"Well?"

"Why, Miss Hooper herself told me the other day that she had signed the temperance pledge. She said it was on account of the children in the Sunday-school that she had done it; she felt she could talk to them of temperance with greater effect if she could tell them she had herself signed the pledge."

"And she spoke justly, Agnes, child; but you are arguing *for* me, when I expected you to join the others in opposing me."

"No, indeed, papa, I do not a bit intend to take your side of the question, for I cannot bear that you should deprive yourself of your wine; but the end of my story is this—that after Miss Hooper had informed me of it, she added that she always drank a tumblerful of pale ale every day at dinner, because it was necessary for her *health*, and that she should continue to do this after she had signed the pledge."

"Ah," said the rector, musingly, "that is the way in which many persons deceive themselves; they think to do good. But I cannot agree with them; if ever any of our school children should discover from the servants that Miss Hooper drinks pale ale, they will look on her as a hypocrite and deceiver, and her example will be worse than useless. No," he added, "I shall not sign any pledge—at least I have no present intention of doing so; but, God being my helper, I will never touch wine again: spirits, as you all know, I never do touch at any time. So now put away the decanters if you have had enough, and go and make yourselves happy in the drawing-room."

The worthy rector did not perceive, for his thoughts were painfully preoccupied, that, for this day at least, the wine had been untouched by any member of his family; even by his son Frederick, a young Oxonian.

There was something in the rector's manner which impressed them gloomily, and with one accord, though without concert, they all on this day abstained from their usual beverage.

The following morning, soon after breakfast, Mrs. Oakley found her husband in the hall, buttoning his great-coat. "Going out so early, my dear?"

"I have a painful duty before me, my love, and I wish to get it over," he replied.

She looked at him inquiringly, and he continued, "I am going to make a bitter enemy, I fear, instead of doing good, but I *must* speak to Captain Archer. I must not let him go on as he is now doing, without one strong effort to draw him out of the pit into which he has fallen. I must warn him plainly of the misery here and hereafter which he is working for himself."

"Dear Edward, you are always right, and always good," cried his wife, affectionately. "I think you *must* impress him by your kind and disinterested anxiety on his behalf."

"God grant it may be so," solemnly returned the rector. "So now good bye, my love; don't forget to send one of the girls to old Mrs. Goodby, and above all remember that some one inquires for Miss Dalrymple." So saying, and with the kindly kiss with which, after more than twenty years of marriage life, he still generally parted from his wife, the good rector set out on his benevolent journey.

The Captain Archer of whom he spoke was a gentleman in the neighbourhood, who had until lately borne an unblemished reputation; but on the occasion of a party in his own house, he had so far forgotten himself as to partake too freely of the champagne which he had provided for his guests, and his conduct in the evening had been such as to scandalize and distress all those who witnessed it. Mrs. Oakley and her family had been amongst these; and it was their report of what had taken place which had determined the rector to endeavour by friendly expostulation to awaken him to a sense of the evil he was doing.

Captain Archer was at home. Always polite and respectful to his clergyman, he received Mr. Oakley

with kind courtesy, and went through those pleasant preliminaries about the weather, in which persons of the most opposite characters and sentiments are generally happily agreed : but ere long he found that his visitor had come on other business than to talk about the frost.

His manner became alternately stern and flippant, as the pastor faithfully, yet in a voice of the utmost kindness, spoke to him of the sin of which he had shown himself guilty. Mr. Oakley was not one to "prophecy deceits," though he clothed his remonstrance in words of Christian kindness ; but Captain Archer, on his part, was not one to listen patiently to what he knew too well to be true. What was the use of making such a fuss just because a man had happened to make himself a little too merry while showing hospitality to his friends ? It was all very well for a parson to talk, because it was his business, but really he could not see what good could come of it. "You know very well," he added at last, "that you always drink wine yourself, and you would not think it very good-natured of me, if I were to grumble any day that I saw you taking a little more than usual."

"Nay, my good friend, thank God, you never saw that in your life : it is a sin to which I have never felt any temptation, but——"

"That is," rudely interrupted Captain Archer, "as you don't yourself know the exhilaration and comfort of a little pleasant drink, you are hard upon those who do."

"Pardon me, Captain Archer," replied the other gravely, "I have almost said my say, but I wish to answer your assertion that I always drink wine myself. That has been hitherto the case, but I have drunk the last drop I shall ever taste. Never will I drink wine again, that a weak brother may say he is encouraged by my example."

"Nonsense !" exclaimed the captain. "I beg your pardon, Mr. Oakley, but really, for the future, you

had better preach to the poor, and tell *them* to be teetotallers, for you will never make a convert of *me*."

The rector saw that this was but too true, and with a heavy heart he took his leave and went on his way towards an outlying district of his parish, to visit some of his poorer neighbours.

Heavy in heart at the apparent failure of his Christian efforts to awaken Captain Archer to a sense of right, he walked on, not heeding any object around him, till, in a narrow lane, he met a person who evidently desired to pass him unnoticed. She turned her head away, as if seeking something on the bank: but she was recognized, and not permitted to pass without a kindly word.

"What, Susan, is this you, so miserable, so ragged?"

She was indeed a miserable object. Still young, yet with a look of hopeless, heavy, stupid sorrow. One unlaced boot and a shoe turned down at heel, exhibited stockings which looked as if they and the washtub had long been parted. An old petticoat whose original colour it would have been difficult to discover, but which was visible in many places through the rents in the dirty gown; a small shawl pulled but not fastened round her shoulders; and what was once a bonnet with dirty roses next the face: no marvel that in such a dress she would gladly have avoided this meeting with her pastor. Behind her hobbled rather than walked a child about six years old, clad with as little regard to comfort or decency as herself. His large eyes, staring senselessly from the wan face, were now fixed on Mr. Oakley.

"My poor Susan, why do I see you thus?" said the rector. "Every time I meet you, every time I enter your house, you seem growing worse and worse: can you not rouse yourself and make some effort to amend?"

"How can I, sir?" was her weary answer. "It's

no use trying: starve we must, and the sooner we're both starved to death the better."

"Cannot you get work, Susan?"

"Not a bit of it: nobody will employ me; they say there is no use giving work to a drunkard's wife. They know," she added, with bitter earnestness, "that he'd take it all from me as soon as I got the pay, so what's the use of working for nothing?"

Poor Susan! It was not time then to remind her from what she had fallen: she had been a servant in Mr. Oakley's house for some years, a nice respectable tidy girl; she had taught in company with her young mistresses in the Sunday-school, and had seemed to value their religious happy home. But she would marry a carpenter in the village. He was clever and active, she said, and would make her a good home. She knew he frequented the public-house, but he promised that when she had married him all that should be given up; and, in spite of the warnings of neighbours, and the affectionate remonstrances of the family at the rectory, she took him at his word, and gave her happiness into his keeping. Soon, in a few short weeks, she began to discover the folly of which she had been guilty; home became irksome to one who had been accustomed to the noise and company of a public-house; and neighbours were not slow to tell her she should have made her husband reform *before* she married him, instead of hoping he would do it afterwards; and unfortunately Susan's was not a temper to do good battle in such a cause. Instead of rousing all her energies to make home pleasant to her husband, she began to sink at once into despondency: the home James would not gladden in the evening, she soon neglected; the smiles with which she first had welcomed him were changed to looks of mournful upbraiding; and, as might have been expected, the demon drink took full possession of the once active carpenter, and all he earned went to enrich the publican, the distiller, and the brewer; leaving

poverty and starvation in the once cheerful home. One child was born, the wretched one we have met in the lane; and for a few days the father seemed to amend. But it was only for a short season; as the child became noisy, and the mother more fretful, the man went off again to where he said they were always cheerful; and mother and child dragged on a miserable existence, pitied indeed by many around them who had known Susan in her happy days, but effectually assisted by none; for as she truly said, all her earnings were too often seized to pay the landlord of the White Lion. All care for outward appearance in herself, her home, or her child gradually deserted the unhappy woman, till she became the wreck which met the eyes of her clergyman and former master. Often had Mr. Oakley attempted to rouse her from this condition of utter hopelessness, but her mind was weak, her temperament desponding, and she could not be roused.

One good fruit of her early training was still left her. In all her misery she shrank from the intoxicating cup: she would not, as so many do, attempt to deaden the sense of misery by what she knew to be a sin.

Poor Susan! Her wilfully marrying against the faithful advice of friends had led her into all this wretchedness; but she would not add sin to folly.

"My poor Susan, go up to the rectory and talk to Mrs. Oakley," said the kind-hearted rector; "and the young ladies will find you some better clothing."

"And what's the use, sir?" almost shrieked the woman. "When he sees me in tidy clothes, how long shall I be let to wear them, think you? They'll be torn off my back for the pawnshop. No, no: you're very kind, sir—too kind to me, but it's no use. I have made my bed, and I must lie in it till I die; and it won't be long first." A racking cough and the withered features seemed to say her words were true.

"Susan," said the rector, gently, "I have often

begged you not to give way in this fearful manner. Look up, my poor girl: there is One above who can comfort even such misery as yours. Don't forget *Him*, Susan, amid your sorrow."

It was a weary hopeless voice in which she answered him. "Yes, sir, I know—I used to know, all that; but you see, sir, when I was young and happy, I did not take it much to heart, and now it seems to me that there's no hope for me at all; I must just live till I can live no longer, and then die like a dog."

"You must die like a *human* being—like an *accountable* being, Susan," replied the clergyman, greatly pained. "But go into my house: it is too cold for you to stand out here; and if you will not have clothing, let my children at least provide you, and this poor little fellow too, with a meal. You know my children love you, Susan."

"Oh, sir, would that I had never left them! But it's too late now."

"Too late to recall the past indeed it is, but let us try to hope for the future. We will talk it over at home, and try to help you, Susan. Go on now, and a blessing be with you." He gently took for a moment the poor dirty withered hand, then patting the child on the head, passed quickly on.

Ill at ease, and burdened with the thought of *others'* sins, a burden so well known to every faithful minister, to every feeling Christian who tries to benefit his kind, Mr. Oakley went forward on his way. It seemed as if the miseries occasioned by drink were rising up in threefold force around him; and how to stem the current, how to recall the erring, or, at the least, how to restrain those who had not already sunk too far to be reclaimed, was a question which absorbed his every thought. He visited the cottages to which he was bound. In some he found neatness, the offspring of sobriety; in some dirt, and wretchedness, and noise; mothers scolding their unruly children, and grumbling at their husbands' drinking

habits ; till he almost began to feel as if there were but one visible sin in the world, and that sin the insensate love of drink.

With a heavy heart the good rector returned to his home. But here there was no appearance of trouble—cheerful loving faces met around the dinner-table : they seemed more cheerful than ever ; and the rector did not fail to observe that there were no decanters before them.

"Where is your wine ?" he inquired of his son ; but before he could reply, the youngest girl, radiant with merry smiles, exclaimed,—

"Oh, papa, while you were out we have been laying our heads together."

"Wise heads no doubt !" interrupted the father.

"Yes, papa, very wise ! Why, there was Fred, who got on so well at nods——"

"*Mods*, Miss Puss, or rather *Moderations*," said her brother, laughing.

"Well, *Mods*, then—I don't see much difference : but you know, papa, it shows Fred is a very clever fellow ; and so, with his assistance, we have been calculating."

"*Calculating* ? A very uncommon thing for young heads to do. I hope something very sensible is the result of your calculations," said papa.

"Yes. We are going to set up a pony carriage," said Lucy.

"A pony carriage ! And what do you want of that ? Strong healthy folk had much better walk : and where is the money to come from, I should like to know ?"

"Ah ! there is the result of our calculations," said Lucy. "You see, dear papa, if you are going to leave off wine, mamma says she will not touch a drop ; and my two sisters say the same ; and even Fred there, for very shame, is going to leave it off."

"Hush, Miss Lucy ! don't say I do it for shame," interrupted Frederick.

"Well, anyhow, while he is at home, Fred is going

to be a teetotaler like the rest of us. I only wish I had ever drunk wine, that I might have the pleasure of leaving it off; but that cannot be helped."

"Go on, Lucy: let papa hear the end of your story," said Margaret.

"Well, dear papa, the long and the short of the story is——"

"The long, you mean," laughed her father.

"Well, the long, then. We took a bottle of wine——"

"No, it was an empty wine bottle," again interrupted Frederick.

"Yes, yes! And we measured how many glasses of wine it would hold. There were just twelve glasses. Now you see, papa, you used to drink about three glasses a day; mamma generally took two; my sisters one each, sometimes a little more; and I think that, with Master Fred's assistance, one bottle did not last much more than one day for the family."

"This looks serious," said the rector; "my wine-merchant's bill must be heavy."

"Undoubtedly, dear papa: and now may I venture to ask what you *pay* for the wine?"

"Well, as we are upon business, I will tell you. The wine we ordinarily drink costs just three shillings a bottle; if we have friends staying with us, I bring out some which costs a shilling more."

"Thank you, dear papa, that is just what we imagined. Well, then, supposing Fred to be abstemious, and not quite finishing one bottle, we give six bottles of wine a week for the seven days—is that fair?"

"Quite."

"Eighteen shillings a week at the minimum, you see, dear papa. So if you would please to let us have the eighteen shillings a week, we would save it up to buy a pony and chaise, and it would cost you no more than the wine does now."

"Very well calculated, with the assistance of Fred," said the rector; "but now, pray tell me what you want

with a pony carriage. Your mamma likes walking, and it is good for you all to be accustomed to be independent of horses and carriages."

"Yes, dear papa; but then, think how many people there are in the village to whom a drive would be a comfort. There is good Mr. Hastings: he is weak, and cannot walk much beyond his garden; how he would love a drive over the hills! Then there is old Mrs. Douglas, and poor lame Betsy; and often a poor girl in a consumption would be the better for a ride. So you see, dear papa, it is to be a sort of hospital carriage for the benefit of the whole village; and the pony is to be called Vinum, because he is all the wine we have."

"Well pleaded, my child, and the case made out entirely to the satisfaction of the court," said her father, when Lucy had concluded her harangue. "Begin on Saturday next: ask your mother for the eighteen shillings, and as soon as you can, get Fred to buy you a pony, and start off on your charitable drives." And then, his voice having gradually lost its tone while he spoke, the good rector added, "And may God bless you all, and help you to shine as lights in the world!"

And a happy social evening with his wife and amiable children removed from Mr. Oakley's mind and heart much of the pain which his day's work had caused.

CHAPTER II.

THERE was a pretty cottage in Holmdale not far from the rectory. Its small flower-garden opened into a lane shaded by hedgerow trees, under which many a wild flower bloomed, and where, even at this Christmas-time, the lovely varieties of moss, the red berries of the butcher's broom, and the white stary

blossoms of the stitchwort, made the banks as beautiful for the season as they were in the sweet spring-time.

A young girl is sitting near the window, her hands busily employed in making up a cap for the snowy head of her aged grandmother, who, seated beside the fire, gazes with looks of love on the young bright creature, the orphan daughter of her youngest son, who was the only one of her kindred left to her now.

Mrs. Douglas was old—very old; more than eighty years had passed over her head. But though they had laid their snows unmingled there, yet was there beauty still in the gentle eyes that seemed to defy Time and his ravages. Dim as they were for use, they were still lovely to look upon: a perpetual summer seemed to glow within them, telling of a heart at peace with all the world—at peace with its own tried self, and, more than all, at peace with God. No one could look at her without feeling that she was ripe for her heavenly home; and yet no one could detect a shade of weariness at her present lot. She was happy in her old age, though all who had made the joy of her youth were gone; for who could need more tender care than Marion bestowed upon that loved parent, who had from her childhood been as father and mother to her?

But though Marion's hands were occupied, there was a tremor in her heart as she listened for the opening of the garden gate.

A relation of Captain Archer, whom she has known from her childhood, has asked her to be his wife. She has loved him long, she has obtained the consent of her grandmother to their union, and she has this morning written to a dear friend in the village to inform her of her prospects. Her aged grandmother cannot imagine that any one whom Marion loved could be other than devoted to her through all the changes and troubles of life. But Marion knew that her friend Janet Hastings had no love for her affianced husband, and it is therefore an anxious hour

with her while she waits for the visit which Janet has promised to pay her in her home.

At length, starting quickly from her seat, and exclaiming, "Here is Janet, granny dear," she ran to welcome her friend.

Janet Hastings was no longer young. Perhaps as many as five-and-thirty winters had passed over her head. Why do we count our age by winters? Alas! too often there seem to have been few summers in our lives; and Janet's appearance might lead one to imagine this had been the case with her. Her soft brown hair had here and there a silky line of white, and the deep blue eyes seemed as if sorrow, even more than time, had dimmed their lustre. When at rest, they seemed to be looking far, very far away into the dreamy long-ago; but when she spoke to one she loved—and Janet loved almost everybody she did speak to—there was a brightness mingled with tenderness in their expression which the loveliest maiden of eighteen might have envied.

She kissed the aged grandmother of her young friend, then placed herself on the footstool at her knees, and began to tell the little news that was stirring in the village—the births or the deaths among the poor around, the well-being of the children of the village school, and all those little things of interest which unite the aged with that external world with which their infirmities forbid their closer contact. She would not tell of the missel-thrush whose joyous song she had heard defying the winter's cold to check his gladness; for she did not like to talk of sweet sounds to the deaf, lest she should raise a feeling of regret; and she did not know that her own voice, softly raised as it was to suit her auditor, sounded in those aged ears like music, sweeter even than that of the birds.

At last, when tea was over, and the fire piled up higher than ever, and the easy-chair drawn close beside it, Mrs. Douglas said,—

"Now, take no heed of me, my children: you have

subjects of your own to discuss; talk freely, for I shall not hear you. Nay, my Janet, don't look sadly for me: I shall hear as well as any of you soon." And the smile which lighted up her features was pleasant indeed to look upon.

So Janet and Marion seated themselves near the table. Both were silent for a time; at last Janet began, "I came to talk to you, darling Marion, not to sit looking at you. So you really have promised Gilbert Archer to be his wife?"

"Don't look so grave about it, Janet dear," said Marion. "Why don't you like my marrying him? You know—that is, you have some slight idea—how much I love him, for you have told me so: do wish me joy, Janet, and do not look so grave." And Marion gazed intently into the face of her friend.

"I wish you to be happy, Marion—I wish to see you happy, not only now, but all your life."

"And why should I not be so?" asked Marion. "He is so good, so kind, so willing to do all a man can think of to make me happy; and though we shall not be rich, you know, Janet, I do not care for that."

"Dearest Marion," said Janet, hesitatingly, "dare I for once speak plainly? Tell me, may I for this one time say all I wish to say?"

"For once and always, whatever is in your mind, let me hear it." Then Marion continued more quickly, and with a sudden look of anxiety, "Surely, dear Janet, you know nothing wrong about Gilbert? I know you have never liked him; but tell me, is there anything *real* to be said against him?" and her looks expressed the deep agitation of her mind.

"Nay, dearest, do not distress yourself," replied Janet, gently. "I *know* nothing against him. He is agreeable, clever, good-looking, well-informed, and apparently very much attached to you; but, my Marion, are you quite certain that, when in London, his life is as steady, his habits as regular, as they appear to be in this village?"

"Why, of course—I suppose—I hope so," stam-

mered Marion. "When we have never heard a word spoken to the contrary, is it not rather uncharitable to doubt him?"

"Dearest Marion, I would not distress you if I did not feel that the peace and happiness of your whole life are at stake. But now, *may* I say it, dear, even if I offend you?"

"You could not offend me, Janet: I love you too well. Say anything you think right."

"Sometimes," said Janet, gravely and gently, "there is a look in Gilbert's eyes that is not seen in those of a *sober* man—I mean in a man who is never overcome with drink; and then the dreadful thought comes over me, 'Is his outward conduct as irreproachable when in London as it is when he is with us here?'"

Marion trembled, but said not a word, and her friend continued, "Marion, I seldom speak of myself, but I will do so now. I will tell you what no human being in Holmdale knows but my dear father. I did not think to be a poor lone woman, earning my daily bread by teaching music. I was engaged, and that for years, to one in whom I fancied every excellence."

"And did he die?" hastily asked Marion.

"Oh, no: would that he had! Worse, far worse than dead did he become to me." And then she told her tale.

"My father, as you know, was wealthy once, and I was brought up with every luxury that money could procure. Near to us lived a family with the younger members of which I was intimate from childhood. Edgar, the second son, had been my dearest friend from our earliest years. I never had a brother, and for years I thought he was as a brother to me; but he said he loved me, and asked me to become his wife; and then I discovered how tenderly, how truly I loved him. He had a passion for a sailor's life, and at an early age he had entered the merchant service; and it was on his return from one

of his voyages, when he was a little more than twenty years old, that we were engaged to be married. We were to wait till he should get on in his profession and be ready to settle down on land; and we did wait. Oh, Marion, how I loved him! How I longed for his occasional visits, when, after the short voyages he sometimes took, he obtained leave to come home for a day! How I admired his fine manly looks, his noble head, his lively manner, his sprightly conversation, and his love to me that sweetened all! I had not thought much of religion then, dear Marion; my life had passed so happily, and so indulged had I always been, that I felt no need of comfort; and so hard are our hearts that we are seldom drawn to God till we have known the dreariness of sorrow. Yet on these visits there were times when a slight expression of contempt for those holy things which in his childhood Edgar had been taught to honour, and a loose way of speaking of sin as a light thing, used to strike me with apprehension; but I hoped it was *only* manner, and that his heart was right notwithstanding. Oh, Marion! for seven years we had gone on loving and hoping for happy days to come, when once he came home—I scarcely knew him, Marion. He had been absent more than a twelvemonth. The bright look of his eyes was gone; they were red and heavy; his clear complexion was become of a dull deep red; his voice was husky; and gradually they let me hear that he had been dismissed his ship just when his period of promotion should have arrived—dismissed for drunkenness! Oh, how I wept and prayed him to cease from this dreadful drink, to give it up at once and for ever; but he said he should die—that for my sake he would be careful not again to take *too* much, but that drink he *must*. He went on for a little time, daily coming to my father's house; but one day—oh, Marion!—one day he came, and I saw that he knew not what he was doing: he reeled, he stammered, and there in that very room where we

had often spent such happy hours, I had to leave him—my father bade me go; and the next day I sent to tell him all was over, we must never meet again.”

“Oh, Janet, why? Your gentle love, your careful watching, might have kept him right!” cried Marion.

“No, my Marion. My weak heart said so too, till my dear kind father pictured to me the home and family of a drunkard. He asked me how I could bear my *children* to see a father’s sin; how I could hope to bring them up in habits of temperance, with the example before them of him whom they were bound to honour, and whom yet they could but despise. Oh, Marion, so devotedly I loved him that I thought I could bear anything for myself, any amount of shame and degradation, if I might but strive to win him from this dreadful state; but I felt the justice of my father’s words, and I cast away for ever, not from my heart, but from my hopes, the love of my life, and every prospect of what the young heart calls happiness.”

She paused, and leaned her face against the head of her young companion.

“How did he bear to lose you?” at last Marion whispered.

“Oh, that was the *worst*,” she shudderingly replied. “He insisted on seeing me, on hearing from my own lips that we must part; and oh, Marion, when he found me resolute, he burst forth in language such as these ears had never heard before. He cursed me, Marion; he cursed my father; he called down every horror upon our heads; he mocked at our *religion*, which could make us cast him off just for a ‘trifling weakness’! Oh, if I had doubted before, I could doubt my path of duty no more: broken-hearted though I was, how thankful I felt that he had shown me his real character; for I had been blinded by my love, dearest, and had not perceived the gradual deterioration which had been observed by less loving eyes. And we never met again. We left the neighbourhood. His family were

angry with us: they said I could have made him steady as my husband. I know not where he now is, on earth or gone. And now, dear child, can you wonder that I look with anxiety on this engagement of yours, and watch your Gilbert more closely than you like?"

"Oh, no, dear Janet—my poor dear Janet," Marion replied; "but why should you compare Gilbert with that miserable man? His tastes are so refined, his pursuits so intellectual; and though he drinks wine like other people, he never takes too much."

"Not *here*, dear Marion; and yet my heart sinks when I look at him. His eyes have sometimes just the look poor Edgar's had before that dreadful scene."

Marion paused awhile, and then at last, "Janet," she said, "I will talk to him, I will try to lead him to the subject, and observe what he says; but indeed, indeed I think you wrong him."

"How joyfully shall I acknowledge my error if it be one! How happy to see my Marion the loved and honoured wife of an honourable man!"

"Well, then, don't let us distress ourselves. It will all end well, and you shall learn to love Gilbert as if he were your brother, my own Janet."

And so the conversation ended, and the narration of poor Janet's sad experience met with the fate she might have anticipated. The young, loving, gladsome heart could take no warning.

"Every man is not like Janet's Edgar; why should I be miserable?" she thought. So miserable she was not. How could she be? The following day her betrothed arrived, and while she gazed at his animated countenance, and heard his expressions of devotion to herself, what could she do but lose in dreams of bliss to come all recollection of the doubts that had been presented to her mind? Candid as she always was, she ventured to tell her lover that there was one who doubted him, and when he laughingly inquired whether it was not Janet who was his enemy, she could not conceal the truth; and he told

her Janet was prejudiced unaccountably against him, and that her fears were groundless.

"When I have you, my lovely one," he said, "to make me a happy home, it will be a hard thing to get me out of it, or make me do anything to pain you."

So, as "love will still be lord of all," Marion trusted in him, and looked forward with nought but hope to her future life with him.

CHAPTER III.

MONTHS rolled on, and the temperance equipage was bought by the family at the rectory: first the carriage, then the pony, as the weekly savings permitted the expense. And happy indeed were the girls the first time that, after due trial by their careful brother, first of the pony's temper, and then of the ability of their young hands to guide the reins, the invalid father of Janet Hastings yielded to their entreaties, and entrusted himself to their care.

"Vinum" went well and frightened nobody: and ere the summer was ended, every invalid in the parish who could mount the easy step, had been driven up the hills, or on to the Downs, by the delighted girls. On one occasion they even persuaded good old Mrs. Douglas to try their new toy: but then Frederick himself held the reins, while Margaret and Marion in the hinder seat chatted and laughed and were supremely happy.

When a hill was to be climbed they were out in a moment, "to help poor Vinum," for which doubtless the pony was duly grateful, though he did not know that his residence with people so considerate as the Oakleys was owing to their determination never to drink wine.

Yet there was one person who felt irritated and almost angry when the history of this carriage was

related to him. Gilbert Archer seemed half to think it a sort of tacit rebuke to himself; and sometimes he ventured, when alone with Marion, to laugh at the absurdity of going without wine "just to give sick folk a few drives." But Gilbert was getting tired of waiting so long for his wife. He loved Marion with all the depth of which his nature was capable, but he could not appreciate the motive which detained her from him; he thought he ought to be *first* in her affections, and he had not himself right principle enough to perceive that sometimes *duty* leads us to deny our inclinations, or rather leads us to keep our inclinations in the right direction.

This was the case with Marion. Deep and true and fond was her love for Gilbert; she blinded her eyes to his faults; she delighted in the hope of spending her life with him: but she loved the parent who had been so faithful to her all her young life, and the idea of leaving her was simply impossible to her.

Had Mrs. Douglas been younger, perhaps it might have seemed a feasible plan for her to go and live in London with her grandchild; but she was too old to leave her home, and Marion would rather have even seemed unkind to Gilbert than caused a moment's pain to one to whom she owed so much.

Yet she grieved to see how unwillingly Gilbert yielded to the long delay, though she saw not what others were beginning to see—that that delay was likely soon to be at an end.

So long had she been accustomed to signs of feebleness in her grandmother; so gradually had it come upon her to do first one and then another little act to help the helpless one; that she never perceived, as the summer drew near its close, that the step was more feeble every day, the voice more low, the gentle eye more dim.

At last he came, the messenger long looked for, long desired: but so quietly did he do his work, so

gently did he draw the willing spirit from its worn-out clay, that though Marion lay by her side, she knew it not. Death came while both were sleeping. One awoke to the joys of heaven, and one to that feeling of utter desolation that comes upon us when we find that the one we loved best on earth has left us on earth alone.

Poor Marion! When she awoke, and, as was her wont, kissed the dear cheek beside her, its unnatural coldness struck her with dismay; but it was long—to her how long it seemed!—before she could realize the solemn fact that it was but lifeless clay on which her lips were pressed. She neither spoke nor moved. It seemed too strange, this death of which she had heard so often, of which her grandmother had spoken so familiarly, so hopefully; and she lay beside her dead, till, surprised at her non-appearance at the usual hour, the servant entered the room.

How quiet we generally are when we feel deeply! How noisy are servants, when, except perhaps for the moment, they feel not at all!

A scream of dismay from the maid obliged poor Marion to speak, but it was only to bid her “hush.” We fear to wake the dead; it seems as though the slightest sound would disturb their beautiful repose; we forget that the dead *are* awake, and far away.

The affrighted maid ran from the room, but she did the most sensible thing in her power—she hastened to Mr. Hastings’ house to call for Janet, and in a short time that faithful friend stood beside the bed.

Poor Marion still lay there: she turned her eyes on Janet with a look as if thought and feeling were alike deadened; she felt the warm tears fall on her face as Janet tried to rouse her, but it seemed as though she could utter no sound.

Tenderly Janet raised her, and at length persuaded her to leave the chamber of death. She helped her to dress—nay, she dressed her herself as if she had been a child: but hours passed away ere she could

succeed in producing any expression of feeling in the poor stunned girl.

She wrote to Gilbert Archer, informing him of the afflicted condition of his beloved. She undertook the charge of all necessary arrangements, and, when night came on, endeavoured to persuade the lonely girl to accompany her to her home. "Come with me, darling: it is better for you than to be here."

"No, no, dear Janet: not while she is here. Let me remain till——" and then at last the tears broke forth, a welcome torrent, which Janet Hastings rejoiced to see.

At length it was decided that Janet should remain with Marion at night, while one or other of the family at the rectory should be with her during Janet's unavoidable periods of absence.

In a few days all was over. The tranquil frame was laid in its last home, to rise again in glorious beauty at the Great Day: and Marion sat in her little room with all she loved most on earth beside her.

Gilbert had hastened from London and was with her now, as was also her faithful Janet.

But Gilbert was now engaged daily, and must leave her speedily.

"When may I come again to take you to be my own?" he had asked more than once.

"Not yet, dear Gilbert—I cannot yet; in six months' time perhaps if you wish it."

"If I wish it, Marion! Have I not been wretched all these long months that we have been engaged? Can we not marry sooner? Can we not marry in three months from the present time?"

Janet looked sorrowfully at him and said, "We must not press her, Mr. Archer. Let her overcome the first sad feelings of bereavement. She could not make you a happy wife now, and you would be still more wretched in seeing her unhappy."

"Janet is right, Gilbert, as she always is," said Marion. "Let us wait till I can feel happy again. I could not laugh and be gay as your wife ought to do,

yet, dearest Gilbert. You don't expect it of me, do you? You can wait six short months more?"

"Not short months, but wearily long," exclaimed he. "But I must submit, and bear my solitude as well as I can. You will take care of her, I know, Miss Hastings."

"Oh, yes, every one is so kind to me!" cried Marion. "The dear good Oakleys will let me stay with them part of the time, and Janet's home is to be mine for a while; and I will try to be happy, Gilbert, for your sake." And the poor girl tried to smile through her tearful eyes, as she timidly laid her hand on his. "And it won't be long, you know, though it seems long now to us both."

Gilbert kissed her hand tenderly; he knew he must submit, and the remainder of the evening passed tranquilly away.

In the morning he returned to London, and poor Marion began in earnest, with the assistance of her friends, to prepare for leaving for ever the only home she had ever known.

CHAPTER IV.

PREVIOUS to his engagement with Marion, Gilbert Archer had been but an idle kind of student of the medical profession, which nevertheless he had entered of his own free choice.

The careless lives of many of his fellow students fell naturally into concord with his own inclinations; and Janet Hastings was but too just in her suspicions, when she thought lightly of his principles and practice.

Living alone in cheap lodgings, with no home to allure him from evil by its holy influences, Gilbert had lived as too many do, who would shudder at the thought of their style of living being known to those

they loved, or whose good opinion they desired to preserve. But now the hope of a lovely wife and a home cheered by her society, seemed to transform Gilbert Archer into a new man. He studied hard, passed his examination with a tolerable degree of credit, and, at the time of Mrs. Douglas' death, had just concluded an engagement as assistant to a practitioner of many years' standing and of great respectability.

Here he set to work in earnest to gain the esteem of his employer; and his pleasing manners, to say nothing of his good looks, which some people care about even in a doctor, bade fair to make his way to fame among those patients for whose slight indispositions he was allowed to prescribe.

"Very good, Mr. Archer, very well—quite the right thing; you will be at the top of the profession in time. Steadiness and perseverance gain the day. When I see you are likely to make a good thing of it, I may very probably retire in your favour."

Mr. Gregory meant what he said. He liked the young man, who had confided to him the secret of his approaching marriage; but perhaps his knowledge of the world, and especially of the young medical world, made him earnest in recommending the virtues most needful, but not most frequently practised.

"But now, my good fellow, tell me, how do you mean to live with this fair young wife of yours? Wives are good things, but they are very expensive ones; your income, at least your professional income, will not support a lady if she is inclined to be extravagant."

"Well," laughed Gilbert, "my professional income being very nearly the only income I have, or am likely to have, it is fortunate for me that my wife will not be extravagant. But you will see, sir, what a capital little manager she is. You may look through the Park, and not see a face more lovely; but she can sew, or even dress a dinner, as well as if she had never done anything else."

"Don't make a slave of your wife," replied Mr. Gregory, gravely; "if you cannot give her an efficient servant, wait till you can."

"Oh, yes, I am obliged to wait for the next six months," replied the young man, carelessly; "but at the end of that time you shall see, Mr. Gregory, what a good wife she can be."

"Be you a good husband then," retorted the other, "for a good wife is worth having, and worth keeping too. What now, Katie, my child, what brings you here?"

A bright lively-looking girl had entered the room, and stood smiling before him. She lightly bowed to Gilbert, and then said, "Papa, I want you to take me to the play to-night."

"To the play, child? How idle you are growing! No, indeed: I have no time for such nonsense," replied the father.

"But, papa, the Johnsons are going, and they want me to go with them, but I cannot walk to their house alone, and you don't like me to go in a cab all by myself; so do, papa, there's a dear good pappy, take me this once."

It was hard to resist his only child, the motherless one who smiled so winningly in his face, yet Mr. Gregory stood firm. "No, I am obliged to visit two sick people this evening; I promised it, and I never break my word."

"But cannot you take me to the Johnsons in your way?" persevered Kate.

"Unfortunately I am going in just the opposite direction," said her father. "Stay, suppose we ask Mr. Archer to take care of you?"

"Mr. Archer?" exclaimed Kate, in astonishment.

"Well, yes, he is an old married man, you know, or at least he is going to be one soon; so I think he might take you just for this one time, if he would not object to the trouble."

Kate looked rather grave; she had not before heard of Gilbert's engagement, and had been half

inclined to a little by-play of her own, with him for its hero; and now she felt somewhat shy at the idea of walking alone with him through the streets. But her father, who had never divined what was passing in her mind upon the subject, saw no objection, and Gilbert was of course obliged to be delighted at the opportunity of doing so slight a service to the daughter of his patron: so at length the desire to join her friends in their amusement overcame Kate's hesitation, and it was agreed that Archer should accompany her to their house. "And if you like to join the party, and go to the play with them, I shall not be likely to require your assistance to-night," said the good-natured man.

Julia Johnson was watching at the window for her friend's arrival.

"There she is, Dora," she exclaimed; "and what a nice-looking gentleman she has with her! Who can he possibly be? I'll go and let her in." And before the servant had time to ascend the stairs, the young lady had opened the door for Kate to enter.

"I'm so glad you are come, Katie: but where is your papa?"

"Papa was engaged, so Mr. Archer—oh, I forgot, Mr. Archer, Miss Johnson—Mr. Archer was so kind as to walk with me."

"And I hope Mr. Archer will do us the favour of coming in," returned Julia, struck with the gentleman-like air with which the young man raised his hat on his introduction.

"Thank you, I think I had better not," replied Gilbert; "Miss Gregory will be safe with you."

"But, you know papa said——" began Kate, and then hesitated; for it would not look well, she recollected, to avow that the possibility of his joining the Johnsons' party had been under contemplation.

"There you are, Katie, always stopping short in the middle of a sentence!" laughed Julia, merrily. "But never mind what 'papa' said: he is sure to have said something kind, so pray walk in, Mr. Archer."

The door was shut, and Gilbert followed the two young ladies into the drawing-room. Here, after having been duly introduced to Mrs. Johnson and her younger daughter, and having declined the cup of coffee which was offered him, Gilbert was left with the elder lady for a few minutes while the girls adjourned to put the finishing stroke to their adornment, and to deluge Kate Gregory with questions about their new acquaintance. Kate had not quite recovered the shock of hearing of Archer's engagement, and her replies were in consequence rather short, and her tone of voice was, if we may venture to mention it, rather impatient.

"Come, Katie, don't be cross; we don't want to steal him away from you," cried Dora; "only do tell us something about him."

"Well, I *have* told you, Dora, he is papa's new assistant, and his name is Archer, and he is going to be married."

"Married!" cried both the girls at once; "who to?"

"That I cannot tell you, for I have never heard; but papa told it me."

"Perhaps papa told you so to prevent you from falling in love with him," suggested Julia.

"Pooh! I fall in love with him!" exclaimed Kate, tossing her head.

"There, don't quarrel, you two silly girls," cried Dora; "let us go downstairs. If we keep Hector waiting we shall hear of it."

So off they ran back to the drawing-room. Here was an addition to the party in one of the sons of the house.

"Where is Hector?" asked Julia.

"Coming later—we are not to wait for him: we have waited long enough already for you, young ladies," replied her brother. "What a punctual woman my wife shall be!" he added, looking, as he imagined, rather severe.

"Your wife won't be a bit better than your sisters,

if ever you have the good luck to get one," retorted the young lady. "But are you not coming, mamma?" she inquired, as she saw that her mother was still seated quietly on the sofa.

"No, not to-night: you will have both your brothers and Mr. Archer to take care of you. Good bye."

They enjoyed the play, for they were capable of no higher enjoyment; but Katie felt more serious than usual, and found it difficult to fix her attention on what was going on. The idea that her father had spoken falsely about Gilbert Archer had struck upon her mind, and she wished her friend had never hinted it. Yet, soon perceiving that her silence was observed, she joined in the laugh of her young companions, and chatted merrily with them.

It was not till the play was nearly over that the other brother made his appearance. So strong was the smell of tobacco which accompanied him, that Kate had looked round before any sound announced his coming, and then she looked not over-pleased, for this Mr. Johnson was not a favourite with her. An innate feeling of delicacy prevented her liking this young man. And if you look at him for a moment, dear reader, probably you will rather sympathise with her dislike.

Unlike his sisters, Hector Johnson was short and thick: not with that thick build which gives one an idea of strength of muscle and of mind, but the heavy fat-like thickness which is only fully expressed by the term "*squat*."

A face the colour of dirty paste; hair a dull brown, rather inclined to the hue of bad hay; eyes a dull grey, tinted around the lids with ugly red; double chin; lips thick and sensuous; teeth black with tobacco; voice husky and harsh; and with all this, a very slight approach to beard or whisker, and a manner either rudely neglectful or offensively familiar, as the humour of the moment inclined; such was the man, just two-and-twenty years old, from whom, after a

slight bow of recognition, Kate Gregory turned quickly away.

But Hector cared nothing for her indifference ; and, after looking round for any acquaintance who might be there, he turned his attention entirely to Archer. Something in Gilbert's appearance attracted him—it was not, you may be sure, the best part of him, his good looks and pleasant manner, but a sort of fellow-feeling, as if beneath that pleasing exterior lurked propensities, if not habits, akin to his own.

Young as he was in years, Hector Johnson was young in nothing else. His whole career, since the moment of his leaving school, had been a downward one. Indulged with a latchkey to his father's door, he still continued to live with his parents ; but none knew when he came in at night, nor where he had spent the evening hours. Sometimes a difficulty in ascending the stairs would cause a noise which, if heard by the servants, awakened the joking remark that Master Hector was a little "screwed" to-night ; but his parents either never heard, or wilfully ignored it. And when, late in the morning, the young man breakfasted alone, neither of them seemed to think or care for the unhealthy and unsteady looks of their eldest son.

He drank freely at home, but wine alone was admitted at Mr. Johnson's table, for he had a sort of idea that it was vulgar to drink spirits ; and for this excellent reason alone he never allowed them ; but as Mr. Hector cared little for vulgarity, he sought at night those places and that society where he might indulge in the forbidden drink without restraint.

This evening he resolved that Gilbert Archer should accompany him. While preparing to leave the theatre, he therefore whispered to him, "How dull all this has been ! Let us go somewhere else."

"But the ladies ?" returned Gilbert, in the same tone.

"Oh, Hildebrand can take care of them : they have not far to go."

Julia overheard this. "No, no, Hector!" she cried; "indeed, there will be such a crowd at first, you must really come with us a part of the way at least."

"Well, a part of the way, till you are in the streets where everybody is asleep," said her brother, yielding the point from perceiving that Gilbert Archer's ideas of politeness were rather in advance of his own, and that he was offering his arm to the fair daughter of his employer.

It was not till our young surgeon had seen Miss Gregory safely to the door of her friends' house, and received the assurance that Mr. Hildebrand should take her home after supper, that he consented to leave her.

"What a bore those girls are!" exclaimed Hector, taking the arm of his new friend as soon as Kate had released it; "one cannot speak a word before them."

"Indeed, I think those are as pleasant a trio as I ever met," returned Gilbert, who, with all his faults, felt a little ashamed of his companion. He thought of the loved and gentle Marion, and almost seemed to *see* her shrink from this man, whom he was thus following wherever he chose to lead. But he must not think of Marion where he is going:—

"All ill come running in,
All good keep out,"

must be said of the scenes in which he is now to be a spectator—alas, must it be said? an actor.

Young Johnson and Gilbert retraced most of their steps till they were once more in the Hay-market.

"This is a coffee-house, mind you," said Hector, with a wicked wink of his dull grey eyes: "but I think I can get you some brandy."

A small fee for admission, and they find themselves in a large room. There is a balcony all round, full of men and women—young men, aye, and old ones too—drinking and smoking; dancing is going on also, but

strength and spirits for the dance seem to be derived from the readily supplied brandy from the bar at one end of the room.

Gilbert has been in such places before; but he has tried lately to live in a more respectable manner for the sake of the pure creature who has linked her fate with his; and he felt vexed with himself for coming there now, and, of course, angry with his companion for bringing him in.

But soon glass after glass of brandy did their work: he lost his regrets in the vile excitement of the moment; he even, invited to it by Johnson, joined in the noisy dance. And who were his partners? Oh, innocent Marion, how little, as you sleep on your quiet pillow, dreaming of joys past and joys yet to come—how little do you deem how the man whom you love more than life is passing those midnight hours!

When morning came, and Archer, an hour later than usual, made his appearance in the surgery, Mr. Gregory greeted him with some severity of manner, and said, "Mr. Archer, I have been surprised at your non-appearance, but I regret to perceive its cause."

Gilbert began to stammer out excuses. He had been taken suddenly ill, he said, and had still a terrible headache; but he was interrupted.

"Mr. Archer, I am not a child! I know the world well; and it needs no great amount of experience to be fully aware of your present condition. Nay, do not interrupt me! there is no use in denying it. I confess I feel grieved at what your appearance betrays. I had hoped that being of gentlemanlike manners, and being now about to take upon yourself the responsibilities of a husband, you would have been more guarded in your conduct."

"Indeed, sir—believe me," stammered Gilbert, "I bitterly repent the past; I was led—it was weak in me, I know—weak and wicked."

"I am glad that you feel it so," replied the elder

man ; "I trust that this may be regarded as a proof that it is not an habitual thing with you. And I feel, myself, that I may have erred. My daughter, on her return home last night, said that you had left her at Mr. Johnson's door, and gone out with Hector. I ought to have warned you of the character of that young man. But I thought you were old enough to know who were fit to be your companions. You cannot be too well aware of the necessity for moderation in drinking. A little wine, or even, on occasions, a small quantity of spirits, may not be amiss ; but you should be *moderate*, sir, and know where to stop."

"I earnestly hope I shall do so for the future, sir ; no one can regret what has taken place more deeply than I."

"Then I won't be hard upon you this once, Mr. Archer ; I will look on it as one of those misfortunes which a little thoughtlessness may bring upon any one, and I will trust to your good sense to keep you steady for the future."

"You shall not be disappointed, sir," said Gilbert, confidently ; "I feel your kindness deeply, and assure you that it shall not prove misplaced."

So the business of the day was begun, and not another word of allusion to the incidents of the previous evening was uttered by either of them.

Mr. Gregory kindly invited Gilbert to dine with him this day ; but, unwilling to be seen by Kate before the effects of his conduct on the preceding evening had disappeared, he excused himself, and when the day's work was over he just entered an eating-house for his dinner, took but one glass of pale ale, and then retired to his solitary lodging, where he intended, for once, to pass the entire evening.

As Gilbert entered his room he saw with delight, mingled painfully with a sense of shame, a letter from Marion lying on the table. She had been

writing to him that evening which he had spent so vilely! He almost hesitated to open it. Conscience seemed to whisper that she had known what he was doing, and that in her letter she would upbraid him. No; it was full, as usual, of her own tender love—her anxiety for Gilbert's well-being, and her gratitude to the kind friends with whom she had, for a time, a home. It told how she was striving, for his sake, to overcome the feelings of grief which still would oppress her at times at the loss of her only parent; all her thoughts and wishes seemed for *him*, and self seemed forgotten in a yet dearer interest.

"Sweet child, I *will* be worthy of you!" exclaimed the lover, as he kissed the letter after reading it; "you shall find a home with me where you shall be happier than ever before; I will do right for your sake, for you deserve more than I can ever do to make you happy."

And Gilbert thought he was sincere—and at the moment, perhaps, he was; but he trusted in his own strength. Strange, that those of us who trust most in this, our strength, have the least of it to trust to! Gilbert Archer had no thought of binding himself by vows or resolutions; still less did he think of seeking assistance from on high, to enable him to resist a sin to which he knew himself to be liable. His love for Marion, he thought, would be enough to restrain him; and he raised his head proudly at the thought, that not even Janet Hastings should henceforth speak evil of him.

Though still suffering from violent headache, he sat down to write to Marion. His good resolutions seemed to strengthen as he expressed to her his unchanging love, and told her all his hopes for the future. Yet what concealment was needful in writing to her, who was to be the partner of his life! He could not tell her he felt ill and lonely, for the illness was the result of sin from which her whole nature would have revolted; he was obliged to write as what he should be, rather than what he was. Yet

Marion, poor girl, was satisfied; the letter spoke of unchanging love to herself, and she perceived not what was wanting, in her fond appreciation of what was really written.

CHAPTER V.

ONE morning, Mrs. Oakley was writing letters, and Margaret watering the pet flowers in the window, when Lucy entered the room with a joyful smile in her eyes.

"Mamma," she said, "Peter has just told me the Dalrymples are coming home again, and that Edward, he believes, is come already.—Margaret, what *are* you doing? The carpet does not want watering!" cried Lucy, suddenly, for she saw with astonishment that the usually careful Margaret was then pointing the rose of her watering-pot most decidedly towards the floor.

Margaret started, and put down the watering-pot; then stooped to see what amount of mischief she had done, and finally left the room, murmuring something about the housemaid which no one could understand.

Lucy stood amazed. "Well, my dear," said her mother, smiling, "when you have done staring at the water on the floor, perhaps you can tell me more about our friends; that is, if Peter had any more news for you."

"Only this, dear mamma: that as their long absence abroad has quite recovered Helen Dalrymple's health——"

"Their absence has recovered her health?" repeated her mother.

"Well, mamma, you know what I mean: she is quite well again, so they are coming home; and Peter says that Mr. Edward has already arrived."

"I am glad to hear it," said Mrs. Oakley; "you

must tell your father when next you see him: he will rejoice to see Edward again."

Margaret had by this time returned, and the damage to the carpet having been repaired, she resumed her watering. In a moment Lucy—who seemed bent upon cheating the flowers of their morning's draught—exclaimed, "Who is this coming up the walk? Can it be? with that fine beard—can it be Edward Dalrymple?"

It was he, sure enough. In another minute he was in the drawing-room, receiving a cordial welcome from Mrs. Oakley and Lucy, and a more embarrassed one from Margaret. But he seemed in too good spirits to notice anything strange. He confirmed the good account of his sister's health, and the announcement of the speedy return of the whole family to their home; and after some further conversation he said, "Is Mr. Oakley at home? I wish very much to see him."

"I will go and see if he is engaged," said Lucy, and off she ran; while Mrs. Oakley said,—

"Lucy is a privileged person: she has the *entrée* of the study. She goes in and sits quietly down; if her father speaks to her, she tells him what she wants; if not, she comes away again."

"A very convenient arrangement for his comfort," said Mr. Dalrymple; "how happy clergymen would be if they had all such considerate helpers, instead of being called off for every trifle, as so many of them are! I hope Mr. Oakley will not see me if it be inconvenient to him."

"Lucy will not tell him you are here if she sees he is too busy," replied Mrs. Oakley.

In a few minutes Lucy reappeared, ushering in her father, who advanced, with the greatest cordiality in his manner, to meet his young friend. After the first greetings he inquired into his present plans of life.

"I have left my pupil," replied the young man; "I hope now to take orders."

"You really hold to your desire to take orders, then?" said Mr. Oakley, with a gratified look.

"I wish it more than ever," he replied. "I have been knocking about the world for the last two years, but now I hope to settle down, and try to lead a useful life."

"There is plenty of work," said Mr. Oakley, "some pleasant, some painful; we could introduce him to some active work in this parish, could we not, my little Lucy?" he added, addressing his youngest daughter. Before she could reply, Mr. Dalrymple had risen from his chair, and with great earnestness, cried,—

"That is just what I want you to do: I want to be your curate."

Mr. Oakley was surprised. "I do not keep a curate, my dear fellow. I am strong and well, and able to do all the Sunday work in the church; and all these dear ones are such efficient helpers to me in the parish, that I think no one suffers for want of a curate."

"But though you don't *require* my services, would they be displeasing to you?" asked the young man, rather anxiously. "It is so greatly my wish to begin my ministerial labours in this parish: my father would so much enjoy my living with him for a time; will you not give me a title, Mr. Oakley? I don't wish one farthing of stipend. I have plenty to live upon; *work* is all I want, not pay."

"Oh, papa!" cried Lucy; "do as Mr. Dalrymple wishes; it would be so nice to have him here, and we'll make a teetotaler of him in no time."

"There, she is going to convert you all in a minute, Edward," said Mr. Oakley. "I am afraid if I give you leave to preach to her on the Sunday, she will preach to you in the week, pretty earnestly."

"Well, sir, I shall be charmed to be so preached to: but how you are grown, Lucy! you used to be my little pet, when I went away—and here you are a regular young lady."

"Oh, no, no!" cried Lucy, with energy; "not a young lady, anything but that—a girl, a genuine English girl—don't call me a young lady!"

He laughed. "There spoke my own little Lucy again; pray forgive me, I did not mean to offend. But now, Mr. Oakley, will you let me be your slave, with Lucy to teach me my duty?"

"Give me a little time to think it over, my dear fellow; I do not like to do anything in a hurry," said the rector. "Stay and dine with us to-day, and then, if I can see my duty clearly to accept your kind offer, and if you are not too much frightened by the girls' account of all the work they have ready for you, why, then, perhaps, we shall settle it happily."

"A thousand thanks, my dear sir," said Edward; "I am certain not to be frightened at my duties."

"Don't be too sure of that; my children have got a new subject on which they will call for all your energies, and they may have to convert you before you can work in the right direction."

"What can have happened?" said Edward, laughing. "You all seemed sober earnest Christians when I left you two years ago; have you turned into Athenians, always wanting to tell or to hear some new thing?"

"I will leave you with the ladies to enlighten you on the subject," said Mr. Oakley. "I am sorry to run away, but the day is getting on, and I must be up at the Hall before one o'clock. I seem to do no good there"—this was addressed to his wife—"but it is my duty to go. I shall see you at dinner, Dalrymple." And then, with a look at Lucy, whose meaning Edward did not understand, he said, "You know where the key of the cellar is, child: don't forget it." And, with a merry laugh Lucy opened the door for her father.

Edward turned towards Margaret then, and said, "You are not altered in the least, but Lucy astonishes me; why, she is not more than fifteen now, is she?"

"*Sixteen*, if you please, sir!" said the spoilt child of the house, without waiting for Margaret's reply. "I was sixteen last November!" And then she added, in an affectionate tone, "But I must always be your little Lucy, Edward: I cannot give up my rights."

"Thank you," he replied, smiling at her kindly; "but now tell me, are you not going out this fine day?" and though he spoke to Lucy, he looked at Margaret, who answered,—

"We are going out; will you come with us? We were going to ask Mr. Hastings if he would take a drive."

"Have you a carriage, then?"

She smiled. "Yes, we are so rich; and it is such a pleasure to us!"

"I am sorry you have left off the nice walks you used to take," he said,

"Oh, we have not given up walking," she replied. "Very often there is only one of us in the carriage. We take out our neighbours. You will be surprised at all this till you are initiated; and I suppose I must leave Lucy to do that."

"Yes, do, there's a good Margaret," cried Lucy. "Shall I go and ask Peter to get Vinum ready? And who will drive to-day?" But without waiting for a reply to her second question, Lucy ran off on her errand.

Mrs. Oakley had finished her letters, and now turning to her daughter, she said,—

"Go and get ready, Margaret, my dear: the pony will not take long." And Margaret went at her bidding.

"It is very pleasant to have you with us again, Edward," said Mrs. Oakley, kindly: "we have missed all your family very much." And so in friendly conversation she occupied him till the return of her daughters, equipped for their drive.

They had not been long; there was nothing slow about those girls—they really were, as Lucy had said, *girls* with no airs; yet when the two entered the

drawing-room with bonnets and cloaks, they looked as pretty and as fresh as the most conceited "young lady" could desire.

"Are you not coming, dear mamma?"

"Not to-day. I am going to pay a visit close at hand, as soon as I have seen you off."

"Shall we trust you to drive, Edward?" mischievously asked Lucy. "You don't know what a skittish animal our Vinum is."

"Let me try this once, and if you see me going wrong, you can teach me, you know, little one."

"Ah, there is a dear good Edward—there is my old name again," cried Lucy; and while Edward held out his hand to help Margaret into the carriage, she sprang lightly into the seat behind.

"To Mr. Hastings!" she said, in a tone of authority, for the arrival of Edward had raised her spirits higher than their wont.

"And how is your friend, Miss Hastings? Is she as gentle and intelligent as ever?" Edward asked of Margaret.

"I think she grows more loveable every day," replied Margaret. "I do not know what any of us would do without her. You were a great favourite with her too."

"She does me honour. I know of no one whose good opinion I more highly prize, except one."

There was something in the tone of voice in which this was spoken which seemed to prevent his hearer from replying to it. Instead of that she turned slightly away; but Edward Dalrymple was not to be so put back.

"Margaret," he said—for though Lucy was behind them she could not hear his voice, it was so low—"you know *whose* opinion I value beyond that of all the world beside."

She was not looking away just now, but straight on over the horse's ears.

"Is Margaret Oakley still the kind true friend she was two years ago?"

"Those who are left behind do not change," she said, softly.

"And do those who go when they leave such as you?" he exclaimed, eagerly.

She trembled.

"Hush," she said; "pray don't talk so here, I cannot bear it;" and the tears stood in her eyes. But his look was one of unmingled gladness as he said, "Forgive me: I will say no more."

They were now at Mr. Hastings' house, and Janet was just coming out at the door. Her look, first of surprise and then of pleasure, as she hastened to the side of the carriage, was most pleasing to the young man. He knew that one whom Janet honoured with her regard was most likely to win Margaret Oakley; and as he sprang to the ground, the questions and replies into which he quickly entered with Miss Hastings, gave Margaret time to recover herself in some measure.

Meantime Lucy had run into the house to invite Mr. Hastings to a drive.

"You have not been out these three weeks, Mr. Hastings: you must come."

"A willing slave at my pretty Lucy's bidding," said the grey-haired man, fondly retaining the hand she had placed in his. "Be as loveable a few years hence as you are now, Lucy, and you will be a happy woman."

"Don't spoil her then, papa," cried Janet, who had entered just in time to hear the final words.

In a moment she had put on his cloak, brought the hat and warm gloves from their corner, and, giving him a parting kiss, helped him to mount the easy step.

"Let Lucy drive now," said Edward.

"Has not Janet some place she wishes to drive to?" inquired Lucy. "I could run home again with pleasure: I have plenty to do indoors. Yes, I see Janet is going somewhere: jump in, Janet."

Janet laughed. "You manage us all, little Lucy. But I can walk quite well."

"Will you let *me* settle the matter?" asked young Dalrymple. "Let Lucy drive Miss Hastings and her father, and we two can walk almost as fast as your pony."

Margaret hesitated; but Janet's quick eye perceived what Edward desired, so she said,—

"Well, I will tell you where I was going: over the hill to old Goodson's; so if you take Mr. Dalrymple's plan, I can go with you."

She said nothing about Margaret and *her* wishes, thinking that the less that was said about them the better.

So it was settled. Lucy drove Vinum, Janet mounted behind, and Margaret was left to take Edward's arm as in past happy days, and walk she knew not, cared not whither. For some time neither of them spoke: when the heart feels much the tongue does not seem inclined to help it; but at length the silence was broken by Edward, yet not before they had reached a quiet lane where they were quite alone.

"Margaret," he said, "I feel that I have been precipitate in speaking to your father about his curacy. I could not live here unless I had the hope that you would share my fortunes for weal or woe."

Her hand trembled on his arm, but she said nothing, and he went on,—

"When I left you two years ago, compelled by imperative duty, I loved you, Margaret, as few men love. I have loved you faithfully through those years, and the hope that I might win you to love me in return has helped me to endure the long, long absence from you. Tell me, Margaret, that my hope has not been vain."

She could not speak, but she turned towards him and looked up one moment in his face. That was enough: all her young heart was in those tender eyes. He scarcely knew she had not spoken, so perfect was his happiness.

And there, in that quiet lane, the fate of those

young creatures was linked together for ever; and they went on and talked, as lovers do, of nothing but themselves, and the truth and depth of their love, which seems to them as if none other had ever felt the like before; and Lucy's drive was over and the pony in his stable, and Agnes and Marion returned from their walk, nay the rector himself had come in, before the happy pair appeared at the garden gate.

Lucy saw them from the window.

"See there," she cried to Marion. "You ought to know what lovers look like. Are not those two born, fated, doomed to marry one another?"

"What, Lucy turned match-maker!" said Agnes. "What is she showing you, Marion?"

"Only two faces looking as happy as they can look, that is all," replied Marion, smiling. "Wait a little, and we shall soon hear that the first act of your new curate's ministerial experience has been to steal Margaret away from us."

At this moment Dalrymple entered alone. Margaret had escaped upstairs; she must feel her happiness all alone just for a little while. It has come on her so suddenly, that dream of her girlhood thus happily fulfilled. She had grieved in secret at the sudden manner in which Edward Dalrymple had quitted the neighbourhood two years ago. She now understood that there had been some pecuniary difficulties in his family, which had led him to accept the offer of going abroad as tutor to a young friend; and that the fear lest those difficulties should prove permanent, had made him feel bound in honour not to attempt to entangle her in an engagement with a man who had neither fortune nor profession. But all the painful past was forgotten now, and Margaret fell on her knees beside her bed, and shed the happiest tears that had ever dimmed her eyes.

Edward Dalrymple was in high spirits. During the dinner he laughed and talked, though principally with the rector or Lucy; and unconsciously, and as a

matter of course, he drank the wine which was poured out for him by the servant; and it was not till the cloth was removed, and the dessert placed on the table, that he perceived that none of his friends were drinking wine. He remarked upon the unusual circumstance.

"Ah," said Lucy, slyly, "I had intended to tell you the whole history, but you ran away from me, and I have not had a moment to say a word."

"You have been talking to him all dinner-time," said her father.

"Yes, but this is for his private ear. I don't want to plague you all with an old story, you know, papa; so drink your wine, Mr. Edward, and never mind *us*."

"Not another drop, till I see you drink some."

Then with a look of pretended alarm, "You have not put poison into it, have you? Are you going to murder me under the mask of hospitality?"

Lucy laughed. "Not a drop of poison have I put into the wine."

"Who has put it there, then?"

"I don't know," she replied, with mock solemnity, "whether it was the vintner or the wine merchant; but drink it, Edward, I don't think it will hurt you."

He looked around—they were all smiling.

"We *ought* to have told you that we had all left off wine," said Mr. Oakley at last; "it seems so inhospitable to give it you without sharing it. But really, Edward, you need not be afraid: it is as good wine as can be bought. Never mind Lucy's nonsense. Do drink it, I shall be distressed if you do not." And to gratify his host, Edward at length finished his glass, but he took no more, and soon they all rose to leave the table.

"As we drink no wine, I never waste time here now," said Mr. Oakley, observing Edward's surprise at his preparing to follow the ladies out of the room. "Come into my study, if you like my company better than that of the ladies."

All the girls, except Margaret, looked back and laughed. She was busily engaged in fastening her bracelet, whose clasp, if we may judge from her manner of managing it, seemed sadly out of order.

"A moment, if you will spare it me," replied Edward, in a low voice.

He followed the rector to his sanctum, and then began his tale. Parents always *are* surprised, unless they are great manœuvrers, when they hear that any man wishes to marry a daughter of theirs. It had, of course, never entered Mr. Oakley's head that when young people had been thrown together from their childhood in the familiar way in which his girls and Edward had been, a more than childish feeling should spring up between them.

But Mr. Oakley was an honest man, and a loving father. He did not regard his children as his property, to do with as he pleased, and mar their happiness whenever it interfered with his fancies: his whole wish was for their well-being in this world and the next, and therefore he gave a hearty consent to the marriage, after Edward had assured him that his worldly prospects were such as would justify him thus early in life in undertaking to support a wife. And it was settled that Edward should be ordained as curate to Mr. Oakley, and should marry as soon as that event had taken place.

CHAPTER VI.

"How nice your garden looks, Lucy!" said Mr. Oakley to his youngest daughter, as he came in to the room where his wife and daughters were at luncheon. "How many flowers you have blooming in this wintry weather!"

"Oh, yes, dear papa," replied Lucy. "The snow-drops are out, and the crocuses beginning to peep, and

the little winter aconite goes on blooming, and the buds are forming on the rose-trees, and I found one violet just hidden under the leaves to-day. Ronald must come and see my garden after luncheon."

"Have you a garden of your own at the Hall, Ronald?" asked Mrs. Oakley of her guest, a delicate-looking boy of about twelve years old, a nephew of Captain Archer, and a great favourite at the rectory.

"I had one," replied Ronald, "but it is all neglected now. I have not the heart to work in it now; and the gardener told me the other day that he wished me to give it up to him."

"I hope you will not do that," said Mrs. Oakley; "you will care for it again perhaps when you feel stronger."

"I don't like to part with it," said the boy, sadly; "there are little trees that Georgie and Algy planted with their own tiny hands, and I am afraid the gardener would dig them up."

"Tell him to let it alone then, my boy," said Mr. Oakley, "and try to care for your garden again, if only for their sakes."

"Come and see *my* garden," said Lucy, "and that will inspire you to begin to take an interest in your own." So when the meal was over, Lucy carried off Ronald to see her garden.

Ronald M'Neil was an orphan. His home, when not at school, was at Holmdale Hall, and till the last few months it had been a happy home to him. But sorrow had come into that house, and not sorrow only but *sin*. Captain Archer, whose conduct had been the occasion of the visit from Mr. Oakley we formerly mentioned, had since that time been gradually yielding more and more to his love for the intoxicating cup. A fearful fever had cut off in their sweet infancy his two only children; and in his grief he not only sought to find forgetfulness in drink, but even prevailed upon his wife to do the same; and thus poor young Ronald had often to witness scenes which

filled his heart with horror. He had himself also suffered from the same fever which had deprived him of his little cousins, and he had not yet recovered his strength, and he felt a daily increasing loneliness. His uncle now never invited him to join him in his rides, and thence it was that his pony's head was often turned towards the rectory, where kind and cheerful looks always awaited him.

Lucy opened a gate which led into the yard. "I have chickens here," she said—"and fond enough they are of flying over the wall and scratching up the seeds just after I have sown them in spring—and bees. Look at my hives, Ronald. I manage them all myself; and I have eggs and honey too, enough for everybody in the village who wants them."

And thus, exhibiting all her pets, and talking in a lively, sisterly manner to the lonely boy, she contrived to make him feel more cheerful than he had been for many a day.

"How many more holidays have you, Ronald?" she asked at length. "Frederick is gone back to Oxford."

"I have one week more—just one week to-morrow," he replied.

"Do you think your uncle would let you spend that week with us? Mamma told me she should so like to have you here, and you could help me to feed the chickens, and give the bees their barley sugar, and you could ride on your pony when we drive out. Should you like to come?"

"Very much indeed," he answered, warmly.

"And they will consent to it?"

"I should think so. I am not much with them now: they don't seem to care to have me," said the boy, in a saddened tone. "I should like exceedingly staying with you."

"Then mamma will write to ask Mrs. Archer's leave, and we can call at the Hall to-morrow, and bring whatever you want, and we will do all we can to be boys instead of girls."

"Indeed," he said, "I hope you will not try to be anything different from what you are."

And so they talked on, till Ronald recollected that it was time for him to return home. "I don't feel the difference myself much," he said, "but the doctor said I was not to be in the night air more than was unavoidable."

"Then you shall go directly if you like." And they went together to the stable to ask Peter to saddle the pony; and with a note from Mrs. Oakley in his pocket asking permission for him to spend the remaining week of his holidays at the rectory, Ronald took leave of his kind friends, and set off on the road to his mournful home.

On presenting the note to his aunt, he waited for her reply. A peevish look came on her face. "You are always going away, Ronald: you don't care a bit for us now," she said.

"Dear aunt, indeed I do," he quickly answered, surprised at her words. "If you like me to stay, I will tell Mrs. Oakley so."

"You know you are the only thing we have left on earth to love," she returned, fretfully; "and it seems hard that you should be happier anywhere than with us."

Now, Mrs. Archer had never shown any pleasure in having Ronald with her. Since the death of her children she had either been shut up with her husband, or walking gloomily in the garden; and she had often met the attempts of the boy to cheer her with sullen indifference or actual complaint at being interrupted. But her temper, unchecked by religion, was soured by her afflictions; and though she had no pleasure in Ronald's society she was jealously dissatisfied at his liking to be with other and more congenial friends. Yet she was content with speaking peevishly, and giving the poor boy as much pain as possible; and when, distressed by her words, he begged to be allowed to remain at the Hall, she

insisted upon his going, with an air of injured affection. So surely does a mind ill at ease with itself seek to impart pain to others; ay, and too often how well it succeeds!

Ronald felt as if he had done some grievous wrong when, on the following day, after taking leave of his aunt (his uncle was out hunting), he mounted his pony and set off to the rectory. He met the phaeton when he had ridden about half of the way. This time it was Agnes Oakley who drove her friends; Marion Douglas sat beside her, and a poor lame boy, a cripple from his birth, had been lifted by Peter's careful hands into the seat behind. Truly the temperance carriage might be termed a convalescent hospital.

"See, Ronald," said Agnes, "dear Marion is going to stay with us all the week, and we mean to be very happy and merry, and you are to grow rosy and fat."

He laughed pleasantly. "I will do my best to profit by your kindness, which is the best way to show my gratitude. But where are you going to now? Shall I ride beside you to make myself useful?"

"Useful and agreeable, yes," said Agnes. "We are going as far as Old Down Farm. Papa walked over this morning to see poor Mrs. Ainsworth; she was so ill last evening that she could not see him, so he went again to-day, and we shall bring him back. Come, Vinum, stop a moment." And in that moment Agnes and Marion had jumped out of the carriage to walk up the hill.

Marion held the reins while Agnes, laying her hand on the back of the carriage, looked smilingly at the lame boy.

"I can't walk up the hill," he said to her, sadly.

"No, but you can ride up it, and have the chaise all to yourself," she answered, gaily. "See how happy the horse is to walk up without us behind him, and

see how brightly the sun shines; and then, do you hear the lark? We will stop at the top of the hill to listen to him."

The child could not grieve about his lameness while she talked to him so kindly, and in his quiet pleasure she felt rewarded for her efforts to make him forget his affliction.

Shortly afterwards they met Mr. Oakley, to whom Agnes gave up her place and took hers beside the poor lame child.

Mr. Oakley asked after Gilbert Archer; had Marion good accounts of him?

Of course she had, and she said so with a blush that showed her beautiful complexion to the best advantage: and Mr. Oakley made her talk of Gilbert, and tell him all she knew of his doings. Be sure, dear reader, it was only the *best* of his doings of which Marion knew anything. But she reported that he was succeeding excellently with his superior, Mr. Gregory, and getting into some of his practice, and in time he hoped, if he managed well, to succeed to the business when Mr. Gregory should retire from active life.

"And then he will be rich, and you will forget us poor folk down here in the country, Marion," said Mr. Oakley.

"Forget you!" she exclaimed; "forget my own dear home where I have lived ever since I was a little child! Forget the spot where darling granny lies, and the dear friends who make me so happy now! Oh, Mr. Oakley, how can you think it?"

"Well, well, I won't think it again, but I can assure you in all sincerity that I shall rejoice in Archer's success. You ought to have a nice home to go to."

"But I must not be particular at first, Mr. Oakley. It would not do to let poor Gilbert slave his life away in making a fortune for me; I must be there to help and encourage him."

"So be it, my child; and God grant you may be happy together!" said the rector, with earnestness.

In such conversation the drive was quickly over, the lame child taken home, and the party safely established in the rectory.

There, for the entire week, it was the endeavour of the kind-hearted girls to make their young guest Ronald as happy as possible.

Lively books of instructive entertainment, or entertaining instruction, whichever you please; the chickens, the bees, pleasant drives daily, and in the evening sweet music, made the time pass swiftly and happily on. Every day Ronald felt that he loved more than before the kindly mother and loving daughters, and a fellow feeling of orphanhood seemed to draw him also to the gentle Marion, whose spirits now at times seemed almost as cheerful as they had been in the cottage where her girlhood had been spent, before the one sorrow of her life had cast its shade on her brow. And Marion, too, was a country-woman of Ronald's. She could sing with him the stirring strains of their fatherland, with a spirit which English tongues, however willing, can never attain; and the boy felt happier than he had ever been since the death of his little cousins, almost happier than since his loved mother had been taken from him.

But happy days pass all too quickly away, and the last day arrived; he must go up to the Hall this evening to bid farewell before leaving his uncle and aunt for school.

The weather seemed to share the gloom of the parting. It had all the morning been dull and dark, sometimes with a drizzling rain, always with an oppressive weight in the atmosphere; but towards evening the sky became clearer.

"See, Roland dear," said Lucy to him, "here is a gleam of the setting sun, a good omen for us."

"I hope so," he said; then after a pause he added,

"I don't believe in omens, and you don't believe in them either, Lucy, and yet we both feel pleasure in that gleam of sunshine."

"Oh," cried Margaret, "if Frederick were here he would read you a lecture about the real and the ideal, and all sorts of wonderful things; but we have no time for that now. Mamma is coming with us, Ronald, to call upon Mrs. Archer; and we are all, except Agnes, going to take care of our boy and see the last of him." Agnes came to the door with the others to bid him farewell; Marion and Lucy mounted behind, and Margaret drove her mother, while Ronald on his pony trotted by their side.

They were all sorry to lose their young companion, and sorry also to see him go to endure the rough life of school, while his health seemed so unfit to bear it; and the oppressive atmosphere perhaps affected their spirits; so, from one or all of these causes, their drive was a very silent one.

CHAPTER VII.

THE phaeton had just ascended the hill near the summit of which stood Holmdale Hall. Ronald was a few yards ahead of them, when they saw him stop as if suddenly struck.

His pale face was now white as snow, his eyes fixed on some object beyond, his mouth rigid.

"What—what is it?" cried their many voices; and so occupied were they with the horrified looks of the boy, that for a moment they failed to perceive the object on which his eye was fixed. And then, what was it?

About a dozen men, and several boys, all silent, carrying a shutter between them, while on it lay, apparently dead, his face covered with blood, in scarlet coat and hunting dress, the body of Captain Archer. They were taking him up to his house.

Quick as thought to do the most judicious thing; Mrs. Oakley cried, "Has any one been to the Hall—does Mrs. Archer know?" and she sprang from the carriage as she spoke.

"No, ma'am, we have just brought him as he is," replied one of the men.

The next question must be asked, and that quickly. "Is he dead?"

"I think not, ma'am, only badly hurt; this looks a sort of faint like. He spoke when we first took him up."

"Come on slowly—give me a few moments first," she cried; and signing to her daughters to detain them behind the shrubbery, she opened the house door, not having even thought of ringing at the bell.

"One of you run for Dr. Mortimer—quick, quick as lightning!" cried Margaret, and a tall boy started off at her bidding.

Ronald was off his pony and at his uncle's side. His face was terrible to look upon; he seemed almost as senseless as the crushed form on the litter.

Mrs. Oakley was met by a servant.

"Can I see Mrs. Archer?"

"This way, ma'am," was the reply. The servant saw by her manner that something was the matter. There was but a moment in which to break to Mrs. Archer the tidings of the condition of her husband; indeed at such times, the heart so readily takes the alarm, that one might almost spare the pains of attempting to disclose a matter slowly.

She knew in a moment what had happened, and was rushing out of the house to meet her unconscious husband, when Mrs. Oakley detained her.

"Wait," she said; "try to be calm till he is in the house;" and she almost forcibly held her back.

Lucy had followed her mother into the house, and now whispered,—

"Where shall they take him, mamma—upstairs?"

"No, not upstairs; here, into the library. Stay with Mrs. Archer, Lucy—keep her here." And she

was instantly in the library, hastily, with the assistance of the affrighted servants, preparing to receive the sufferer.

He groaned faintly as they laid him down; it gave him pain to move him.

"Thank God, he lives!" cried Marion.

Mrs. Archer would not be restrained: she rushed into the room, and was about to throw herself upon her husband; but Mrs. Oakley seized hold of her just in time, crying,—

"Stay, don't touch him—pray don't! we know not where he is injured."

The unhappy wife turned from one to the other vacantly, and then, fixing her eyes upon her husband's face, cried, "What have they done to him? How did it happen?"

One of the men had lingered in the room, and said, "It was nobody's fault, ma'am, as I can see; he was riding at a fence, and the horse missed it, and fell over, and rolled over him, and there were stones on the ground—it was an ugly place. I thought his leg seemed broken when we lifted him up."

She pointed to his face, the power of speech seemed to fail her.

"His face is cut, ma'am, certainly, but it has bled plenty: I don't think that is the worst part."

No more was known, no more was to be done until the doctor should arrive, save gently to wash away the blood from the face, and to moisten the lips with water.

Happy was it for Mrs. Archer that, at a moment so terrible, the kind-hearted and sensible wife of the clergyman was at hand to assist her. She was utterly prostrated by the sudden shock. Mr. Oakley gave her orders to all around, sent one of her daughters to pay the men who had carried the sufferer home, and despatch some of them to different places where it was possible Dr. Mortimer might be found should he not then be at home.

But fortunately Dr. Mortimer was quickly found,

and galloped to the Hall as fast as his horse could carry him. He had ordered his assistant to follow him as speedily as possible.

The man who had lingered in the room now stood in the outer hall ; but when the doctor entered it, respectfully coming forward he said,—

"If you please, sir, if you should want any more help than the ladies can give, I was brought up in a doctor's house, and I think I might be of some use "

"Thanks, my good fellow, very likely: wait here till I call you ;" and Dr. Mortimer entered the library.

"Have you courage, Mrs. Oakley, to remain with me till my assistant arrives ?" he asked.

"Oh, yes."

"Then, let them take Mrs. Archer away, and remain with her."

The girls did as they were desired, the two Misses Oakley taking the distressed wife by the hand, while Marion gently laid hers on Ronald: "Come, dear boy."

"Let me stay—pray let me stay!" he cried.

A look from the doctor was enough for Marion.

"Not now," she whispered, and led him away.

Two or three female servants remained in the room. The groom was gone in search of his master's horse, the other man stood in the vestibule.

After carefully examining his patient's head, and feeling the almost imperceptible pulse, the doctor drew out his knife.

"These boots must be cut," he said: and with care, but speedily, the whole thick topboot was ripped open. A terrible sight presented itself. "Go now, dear madam," said the doctor quickly, "and send William Harris to me—he is waiting in the hall: he can do all I want just yet."

She went, and summoned the man.

It was a compound fracture, the bone in two places protruding through the skin, the whole leg looking crushed. The sufferer groaned as Dr.

Mortimer examined the injured limb: but at length, the assistant having arrived, the fractured limb was set, and cooling bandages applied with skilful yet gentle hands. It was a long affair: to those who were waiting without it seemed the work of hours. Mrs. Oakley, with one of her daughters, was endeavouring to calm poor Mrs. Archer, while in another room Marion and Lucy sat with Ronald.

But at length their suspense was ended: they heard the doctor's step in the passage; he was going to Mrs. Archer. "May we follow you?" whispered Lucy. He signed acquiescence, and the three stepped gently after him, the very sound of their own light footsteps seeming too noisy for their feelings.

By looks only could any of that company make inquiries when the answer was so much to be dreaded. Dr. Mortimer was grave, and his words were cautious.

"It is a very serious injury, requiring the greatest care. We must get a nurse from the village."

"Is there danger?" in a choked whisper asked Mrs. Oakley.

He looked at her.

"We cannot judge at present. All that can be done to-day is to keep him quiet. I do not think he is conscious, though he has groaned several times; but we can never be certain how much is heard by the sick when they appear to be in a state of stupor."

"May I go to him?" asked the poor wife.

"If you can control yourself, and not exhibit any agitation, not otherwise," he replied. "I will see that he wants for nothing, I shall not leave him yet."

Mrs. Archer moved towards the door.

"Can you trust yourself?" said the doctor, gently detaining her. "Remember that agitation now might be his death."

"Oh, I will! I promise to be calm; but where

should a wife be but beside her husband in such a terrible case ? ”

He let her go. The assistant was sitting near the sufferer, and as he signed to her not to come too near, she sank into a chair, and sat gazing in silence on the stricken man.

As soon as she had left the room, Mrs. Oakley said, “ You have told her but little, will you tell us more ? ”

He glanced at the poor pale boy, who stood ready to devour his words.

“ Oh, Doctor Mortimer, let *me* know all—indeed I can bear it ; I shall expect the very worst if you do not let me know the truth.”

“ Then I will tell you all I know myself. The accident is a terrible one, the injury to the leg severe, and I have much reason to apprehend concussion of the brain. Had he been what he was five years ago, I should have said that there was much hope of his recovery ; but now——”

He paused, and Ronald seized his hand. “ Tell it all ! ” he whispered.

“ The system is so much reduced, the constitution so shattered by the habit he has lately acquired, that there is reason to fear the worst.”

A moment’s pause. Then shuddering, Mrs. Oakley said, “ Had he been drinking before the accident ? ”

“ I cannot hear that he had, but the whole blood is vitiated by spirits ; yet,” added the doctor, kindly, noticing the deep anguish with which poor Ronald was overcome, “ we must hope the best. If we can get him through this illness, he may rise from his bed a better man. He may see how fearfully his constitution has been shattered by his own acts, and may reform altogether. Come, my boy, cheer up : you know where to look for support better than many of us, I am sure. Mrs. Oakley, will you take him with you to the rectory ? It is better for him than staying here.”

“ He was about to return to school to-morrow,” she replied.

"That must not be yet," returned Doctor Mortimer, gravely; "but he had better be with you for a time."

"Pray let me stay here, dear sir," entreated Ronald, shivering with agitation. "I may be some comfort to my aunt in her trouble; I cannot bear to run away from her."

Mrs. Oakley interposed. "I shall remain here to-night, if Mrs. Archer will allow me," she said; "shall I keep Ronald here? and then to-morrow he can go to our house if you think best."

"Let Miss Lucy stay, then, to keep him company," said the doctor. And thus it was arranged.

After Doctor Mortimer had once more visited his patient, and given them his last report, Margaret and Marion returned to the rectory.

A mournful night was passed in the house of sorrow. When Mrs. Archer found that of truth she could be of no use, her distress was ungovernable. She could not be allowed to remain in the sick-room, and the kind friend who had volunteered to remain with her found it a hard task to attempt to soothe her in any way.

Lucy sat with Ronald in his own little sitting-room. For some time few words were spoken, but at length, with a sudden burst of feeling, Ronald exclaimed,—

"Oh, Lucy, why will not people call things by their right names? Why will they not call them what God calls them?"

Lucy was startled, and asked what he meant.

"Why, you see," he explained, "people never speak of drink as if it were a *sin*. They say a man is 'merry,' or 'overcome,' or 'intoxicated,' or some such word; they do not say he is *drunk*: and yet that is the word used in the Bible. I remember, years ago, when I was a little child going with my precious mother to a church near Hastings, and there—I forget all else of the sermon, but one

word I can never forget. The clergyman said, 'God called drunkenness, *drunkenness*.' I think people *could* not drink as they do if they thought of that!"

Lucy looked at her young companion. His dark eyes were gazing straight before him, revealing the deep thoughts within. The memory of the mother he loved, and the earnest desire to call things as God calls them which that mother had awakened in his young mind, for a moment made him almost forget the present occasion for sorrow; but soon turning again towards Lucy, he said,—

"Did you know, Lucy, how it was that my dear little cousins caught the fever of which they died?"

No, Lucy did not.

Then Ronald told her how on that Christmas evening, when Captain Archer had so shocked his guests, that Mr. Oakley had felt it his duty to speak to him of his conduct, he had insisted on his two children being taken from their beds to join the company. They had cried so bitterly, that Miss Helen Dalrymple had taken them in her arms to soothe them. She was very ill then with a violent headache, which, on the following day, was discovered to be the beginning of an infectious fever. The babies nestled in her arms, and took the fever, which soon freed their little loving spirits from the houses of clay.

"Had my uncle left the dear ones in their beds, they might have been here now," added Ronald, in a tone of grief.

Lucy would not answer him; she could only lay her hand on his in token of sympathy; and he went on,—

"Oh, Lucy, they were such dear little ones! So beautiful, so good, so happy, and so alike, that unless you saw the little bracelets on their wrists, you did not know one from the other. I know it is wrong to grieve; but I have never felt what it is to be happy since they were taken away!"

"Dear Ronald!" said Lucy, tenderly. "But *they* have never known what it is to be *unhappy* since they went away. They were beautiful flowers here, but they bloom for ever there—think of *their* joy, and try to rejoice in it. And think," she added, in almost a whisper, "what they might have learned to be if they had continued here."

"Thank you, Lucy—thank you. I will try to take your comfort—it will not be long before we shall see them again—and yet, when one's heart feels sad, it does seem so long! When I had the fever—after Georgie and Algy were gone—I could not help hoping I might go too! Yes, I know it was wrong," seeing Lucy was about to interrupt him, "and I hope I have now learnt to be ready to live here so long as God pleases."

"Live to glorify Him, dear Ronald, and you will be happy!"

And so they sat in confiding conversation, or reading a few words of comfort from the Book of books, till Mrs. Oakley, having just come in to prevail on the weary boy to go to bed, and to send Lucy to take possession of that one which had been prepared for her, returned to the unhappy Mrs. Archer, who was walking up and down the room like one distracted.

"Don't talk to me, Mrs. Oakley!" she cried. "Don't tell me to be calm!—don't say I ought to be patient! Why am I afflicted more than any one? Why have I lost all my children? And, now, why has this dreadful misfortune overtaken me? It is cruel—cruel!" and she wrung her hands in despair.

Mrs. Oakley knew it was vain to attempt to console her—vain to endeavour to reason with her in her present agitated state. She began to feel that she might as well have left her, for the poor wife seemed utterly unconscious of the kindness which had dictated her stay, taking it as a matter of course that she should be there.

Mrs. Oakley never suspected that when she had

left the room to go to Ronald's, the wretched woman had sought the cellaret, and taken a large glass of brandy to "*support* her," as she said to herself while she drank it. Alas! it only added to her state of excitement—only made her see more strongly and hopelessly than before the successive afflictions which had tried, but never purified, her husband and herself.

Again Mrs. Oakley left the room, to steal softly to the door of the library, where Doctor Mortimer, and the nurse he had sent for, kept anxious watch.

The doctor heard her, and came out.

"It seems more like sleep just now," he said, in a low voice. "Cannot you go to rest, Mrs. Oakley? You are not strong; and this will be too much for you. Try to persuade Mrs. Archer to go to bed."

"Will not you rest?" she asked.

"Not to-night. I shall leave in the morning, when Lawson will take my place. Good night; go and try to rest."

She left him, and returned to her hopeless charge. This time, a larger glass of spirits had been taken; and the bottle, which had previously been hidden, stood on the table. Mrs. Oakley started.

"There, take some!" exclaimed Mrs. Archer, in a hoarse voice; "it will do you more good than anything else!"

"Oh, dear Mrs. Archer, come to bed! do not—I entreat you—do not take that poison!"

"Poison, is it?" And she laughed, a light unnatural laugh. "Very pleasant poison! the best comforter for the miserable!"

And she was about to pour out another glass, when Mrs. Oakley seized her hand.

"No—no; you must not—you shall not!" she exclaimed; "come away from it—come to bed!" and she tried to lead the unhappy woman to the door.

"What nice comforters these religious people

are," muttered Mrs. Archer, as she went out; "they won't let one have anything to do one good. All talk and cant with them!"

The kind Christian lady paid no attention to this insulting speech; she saw that the shock and the anxiety, followed by the brandy, had made her companion almost unconscious of what she said. She continued to lead her up to her room, and then left her, resolved that on the following day she would take Ronald with her to her own happy home.

CHAPTER VIII.

FOR some days, Captain Archer's life hung as on a thread; but at length he returned to occasional consciousness. The wound in the leg, however, seemed "angry," and unwilling to heal. His sufferings were intense; and the impatience with which he bore them increased them threefold.

The two doctors had given up their constant attendance, though one or other of them was with him many times a day; but the nurse was steady and careful in obeying their orders: and there appeared to be a reasonable hope that, even with his shattered constitution, the captain might recover.

It was about ten days after the accident, that Doctor Mortimer ventured to express his hopes.

Mrs. Archer had, by this time, been allowed to be in her husband's room; and it was evidently a pleasure to him to be conscious of her presence. Yet, he seldom spoke, except to complain of pain; and she, poor woman, had no word of comfort, which might have enabled him to bear the pain more patiently.

They had lived without religion in the days both of their prosperity and of their past adversity, and

they neither desired its consolations now, nor knew how to appreciate them.

Ronald was daily at his uncle's door; but was seldom allowed to enter; and the anxiety of his mind showed itself in increased paleness and debility, till his anxious friends became desirous of sending him back to school for change of scene, of thought, and of feeling; and about a fortnight after the accident, he left the rectory, and returned to battle with the rough world at school.

On that same day, the nurse having left the room to go downstairs for her dinner, Mrs. Archer was alone with her husband.

"I feel so low, Clara," he said. "The doctors are killing me—they make me so weak."

"I am afraid it is illness which makes you weak, my dear," she answered, gently; "but you are better, and will be quite well soon."

"The doctors say I am better; but I feel as weak as water. Do be a good dear creature, and give me a drop of brandy."

"Dr. Mortimer forbade it strictly. I am afraid to go against his orders," said the wife; yet there was a hesitation in her manner, which the invalid perceived.

"That is all nonsense!" he replied, impatiently; "what harm can it do me? It will only make me feel stronger and better. How can one ever have strength to get over such an injury as this without something better than water-gruel? Come, do be good-natured, and make haste, before nurse comes back. She'd make noise enough, if she caught you making your poor husband comfortable. Go and fetch it quickly!"

Mrs. Archer did as she was asked. She hastened to the cellaret, and soon reappeared with a wineglass full of brandy.

"I put a drop of water in it, dear, just that it might not be *too* strong at first."

"You might have left out the water: thank you, my wife, you are the nurse for me, I shall soon get well now;" and he drank the last drop of the poisonous spirit.

There had been no time to lose, for the nurse returned to the room just after Mrs. Archer had escaped with the empty glass. But she observed nothing then, and took her seat quietly by the table, after one glance had shown her that her patient was lying quiet and apparently comfortable.

But in a short time Dr. Mortimer entered. He sat down close beside Captain Archer, and if he had not detected it in the heightened colour and excited looks, another organ than that of sight would have convinced him of what had happened.

"Nurse," he said, in a tone of severity, "who has been giving brandy here?"

"Brandy, sir!" cried the nurse, starting up from her chair and approaching the doctor quickly, "there has been no brandy here. I know well enough that it would be as much as his life is worth to drink brandy now."

"Brandy he has been drinking," insisted the doctor; "who has given it him?"

"Come, come, doctor, don't make a fuss about it," stammered the detected man; "I own to a little drop, but nurse had nothing to do with it. It has done me good, I assure you—I feel so much better for it."

Dr. Mortimer made no reply, but rose hastily and left the room in search of Mrs. Archer. He found her in the dining-room, and walked straight up to her.

"Mrs. Archer," he said sternly, "do you wish to commit murder?"

She trembled at his words. "Dear Dr. Mortimer, what can you mean?"

"You know what I mean," he said, in his extreme anger, unwilling to spare her; "is it not enough that your husband killed his children through his insensate love for drink, but must *you* murder him?"

She held by the table for support. "I have done nothing," she said at last.

"Do you call giving him brandy nothing?" exclaimed the doctor.

"Indeed, indeed, it was only a drop, and he seemed to wish for it so very much, he said it would do him so much good—he felt so weak."

"Mrs. Archer," and this time Dr. Mortimer's voice was like thunder, "I can only tell you this,—if he survives the attack which is certain to follow your mad act, I have but one word to say—that the *next* drop of brandy or any other spirit, which you give your husband, will be the signal of my dismissal: I will attend him no more; you must bear alone the consequences of your folly." And he turned away and left the house.

He was angry, there was no doubt of that. He was in a passion, and had spoken the truth more strongly than he would have done in a calmer moment. He mounted his horse, and a gallop of a few minutes helped to soothe his ruffled temper. Then he dismounted, and walked a little; then turned again and rode towards the Hall.

"I must see if anything can be done to counteract the spirits," he said to himself. But that was no easy matter, for by the time he entered the house he could hear the voice of its master talking loudly.

Dr. Mortimer listened for a moment before opening the door of the room. Mrs. Archer had not yet returned thither; the doctor's words had frightened and shocked her, and she dared not present herself before her husband while her agitation was so visible.

"Who says I shall not drink brandy? Who wants to kill me?" the captain kept repeating to the affrighted nurse. "See how much better I am; I can talk now. Who says I shall not drink brandy?"

In vain the woman strove to quiet him, and the doctor entered.

"Ha! it is you who want to starve me, doctor; but

I've been too much for you ; I want to get well," rambled the unfortunate man.

"And I want to get you well," gently replied the doctor—he never showed temper beside a sick bed—"so you must let me take care of you ; here, drink this," he said, offering a draught he had just poured out, "this will do you as much good as anything."

"Nasty stuff! all your stuff is nasty," said he, ungratefully ; but he drank the mixture, and while Dr. Mortimer remained beside him, he lay quiet.

After a while, hoping the stillness would subside into sleep, the doctor withdrew ; he had many patients yet to visit before that day's work was done ; but he beckoned to the nurse to follow him, and in the vestibule he earnestly impressed upon her the necessity of restraining the unhappy propensity of his patient to drink, and warned her of the danger that was even now imminent. She promised to be careful, and not to leave the room, especially if Mrs. Archer was in it. How terrible that it should ever be necessary to guard a sick man from her who ought to be his most devoted nurse ! Had she not loved spirits herself, this caution had not been needful.

CHAPTER IX.

RESTLESS with increased fever, caused by the spirits he had taken, Captain Archer proved most difficult to manage. The nurse was forced to give him another draught similar to the one Dr. Mortimer had administered, but nothing seemed to have the effect of calming the excited brain.

Mrs. Archer sat beside him in deep anxiety, and repeatedly he urged that she was a sufficient nurse for him, and that the nurse had better go and obtain some rest. He had never seemed to think of the poor woman's fatigue till this evening. In truth,

she did feel weary and worn, and when the repeated entreaties of the captain were echoed by Mrs. Archer she retired to take an hour's repose.

No sooner had the door closed upon her than Captain Archer, seizing the arm of his wife, exclaimed, "If you don't want me to die, give me another glass : this raging thirst ! the horrid medicine does not slake it, I shall die of it unless you give me what I want."

"But Dr. Mortimer was so angry with me, dear ; he would never forgive me," pleaded the wife.

"So you care more for Dr. Mortimer than for me !" exclaimed the unreasonable man ; "you won't save my life for fear of making *him* angry."

"But he said it was so bad for you."

"And much he knows about that ! As if I could not judge for myself how I felt ! Come, Clara, be a good wife for once, and go and fetch the bottle. I can hide it here under the bedclothes if nurse comes in. Go, Clara, quick ! You know I would do it for you if you were ill, and suffering so much for want of it."

The doctor's words were not forgotten ; they caused her to walk tremblingly, and like the guilty thing she really was ; yet, accustomed always to seek to please her husband, and not recognizing the extreme danger of the probable result of her actions, Mrs. Archer went for the bottle, brought it and a glass into the sick room, and, after listening carefully to be sure the nurse was not coming along the passage, she fastened the door, took water from the kettle which was on the side of the fire, melted sugar in it, then poured in a full allowance of the deadly spirit, and brought it to the sick man.

Could she plead ignorance as her excuse ? Had not the doctor warned her of the danger she incurred ? Alas ! her own love for the intoxicating beverage rendered her insensible to all but the feeling of the moment, and that feeling was a desire to gratify her husband.

He swallowed the whole tumblerful.

"Make some more for yourself, and give me a drop of it," was his insane request immediately after: "depend upon it old nurse is fast asleep."

She did mix another glass, drank the greater part of it herself, and then, as he put out his trembling hand for the draught, she held it to his lips, and he ceased not till it was empty. Then quickly she shut away the bottle and glass in a cupboard in the room, of which she kept the key; noiselessly unfastened the door, and sat down beside her husband as if nothing unusual had been done. But soon was she destined to be undeceived.

As she sat quietly beside him congratulating herself on the sleep into which he appeared to have fallen, the nurse entered the room.

The woman started, for the smell of the heated spirits filled the apartment.

"Oh, Mrs. Archer!" she shrieked, "what have you done?"

This was enough: while Mrs. Archer sat in conscious guilt, the wretched man suddenly seized her arm. His eyes flashed fire, he tried to rise, then sank back with a scream of agony, for he had forgotten his broken limb.

"Who says I killed the children? Why do they come here? Take them away, take them away! don't let them come!" and he screamed on, "take them away!" beating with his hands at the vision of his brain.

The nurse strove in vain to quiet him—to assure him there was no one there. He *saw* them distinctly, the angel babes in their young beauty as he had seen them last, and the sight was agonizing to his distracted brain.

"Oh, send for Dr. Mortimer," cried the terrified wife, unable to quiet or restrain the struggling wretch. He caught her words.

"Send for Mortimer; yes, yes, let him take them away; why do you let them come? Georgie! Algy! take them away!"

Was it conscience working now? No tongue had uttered to that wretched father the terrible truth that he had killed his babes in his drunken freak; and no word had he ever before spoken to give an idea that he had admitted for a moment the dreadful truth: yet now in his wild delirium conscience asserts her power; too late for repentance, too late for amendment, she awakens only to torment. Will any torment more terrible than conscience be needed in the world of retribution? To remember and remember for ever our evil deeds, will not that be enough to cause the "worm that dieth not," and the "fire that is not quenched?"

The messenger was swift, and the doctor was soon by the bedside. Horror and anger both took possession of him when he perceived the truth—that, after all his warnings, the miserable wife had again mixed the poison for her husband, the husband of her youth, whom for so many years she had loved so well.

Dr. Mortimer had declared he would give no more advice in such a case; but humanity got the better of his resolution. He had come prepared with what remedies he deemed most suitable to the case, but he saw that it was one beyond human skill.

In a moment of comparative quiet, he examined the wounds on the leg: in its inflamed appearance the signs of incipient mortification were clearly visible; and ere the doctor could arrange the bandages neatly again, the patient was screaming to him to take away his children. Wherever the wild eyes rolled they seemed to see those forms, here, there, above, below. He hid his head under the bed-clothes, and then, with a shriek of agony, exclaimed, "They are here too! oh, take them away!"

But we need not dwell further on a scene so harrowing; we would not have dwelt on it at all had it not been with a hope of warning some to avoid this dreadful malady ere it be too late. It was the fiercest form of delirium tremens, the drunkard's own

disease, the terrible disease in which his wild screams preach temperance, and yet we will not hear.

The entire night those dreadful screams continued. Mr. Lawson came to aid his superior; the groom, the gardener, all were needed to restrain the preternatural strength of the delirium, and hinder, if possible, further injury to the shattered limb; but not until the morning when the sun arose, and the busy world awoke to its daily toil, was there stillness in that darkened room; the struggle was over then, the strong man subdued, and death had claimed his own.

He was cut off in his prime. Who cut him off? His constitution was good; no poverty, no want, no affliction had laid him low; surely his was the death of a suicide. They will bear him to his grave with pomp and show, and the dark plumes will wave over him, and a stone will tell that he died at the age of forty years; but for forty more he might have lived in wealth and honour, and died respected and beloved, had it not been for the accursed drink, the bane of thousands upon thousands. Oh, when will they take warning?

Her love strong even in the last dreadful scene, Mrs. Archer would not leave the sufferer, and, when at length she knew that all was over, she still sat on; no word, no tear, no movement, betrayed her anguish.

At length Dr. Mortimer, taking her by the hand without a word, led her away.

And now his work was done. While listening to the raving of the dying man, while endeavouring to assuage his agony, he had felt no weariness; and now it took the turn rather of excitement than the desire for repose. He mounted his horse, and galloped home.

He was a bold rider, was Dr. Mortimer; he loved horses, and though he rode them fast he fed them well, and gave them many a day of rest; and the one he rode this morning was his favourite of all. It had been happily resting in the stable through that

long night of woe, and now was as ready as its master could desire for a gallop over the downs.

The cool morning air and brisk exercise exerted their proper influence in soothing the doctor's mind. He had known Captain Archer long, and until the last year had respected and liked him; and now his terrible death came on him as a shock indeed.

He wished it were a fitting hour to call at the rectory. He felt in no mood for visiting his patients; but it would have been a relief to pour out some of his thoughts to the worthy rector, whose whole life was spent in sympathy with others.

At that moment a glimpse of the cottage where old Mrs. Douglas had lately dwelt recalled to his mind a duty to be done. "Gilbert Archer must be written to," he said to himself; "that poor woman has no one to do anything for her. I will go home and write this moment."

He looked at his watch; there would be just time to catch the early post.

"And Ronald too, the poor dear boy; only yesterday he left us, and now he must return. The Oakleys shall write to him, I have not the heart to do it."

He hastened home, and wrote briefly and hurriedly to Gilbert. Then after a bath, and his breakfast, which, in spite of his agitation, was as substantial a one as could be desired, he was ready to walk to the rectory.

The intelligence of the death of Captain Archer had not reached the Oakleys, and they had just dispersed through the house or grounds for their morning duties, when the doctor appeared.

Margaret's beaming face was the first he met, but it changed in a moment when she looked at him. "Something is the matter," she said quickly. How love will frighten itself! A thought ran through her mind that the matter might be connected with Edward Dalrymple.

"Have you news from the Hall to-day?" asked the

doctor by way of reply. She felt relieved, but answered, "No."

It must be told then, and by him. Margaret took him into their morning room, and at his request sent Lucy to summon her father from his study. He told them all—the draught of brandy which he had first discovered, and the smell of heated spirits which had needed no words to show him the cause of the fearful condition in which he had found his patient.

"Oh, how could Mrs. Archer, how *could* she do it?" repeated Mrs. Oakley, as if the account of such conduct were incredible.

"It is inconceivable," replied the doctor: "I could not have believed it, had I not had the proof. I taxed her with it while he was suffering, and she could not deny it."

"But may it have been the nurse?" urged Mrs. Oakley.

"The nurse is a sober woman, and has too much knowledge of the danger to give spirits, unless under my direction. Unfortunately she yielded to Captain Archer's commands to leave the room for an hour's rest, and in her absence it was that this occurred."

While Dr. Mortimer was still at the rectory, consulting what might be the most judicious mode of breaking to poor Ronald the dreadful tidings, Edward Dalrymple entered.

When he had heard the story, he was prompt to act, with all the quickness of a young and energetic man. "I will go for him; it will be better than letting him travel alone with this sorrow on his mind. He will remember me doubtless, though I have not often seen him; and it will be some comfort to him to have a friend even such as I am."

Margaret looked her thanks, but the others were warm in their acknowledgments. The doctor highly approved of the plan.

"When will you go?"

"By the next train."

He looked at his watch. "It starts in ten minutes ; I must be off—good bye."

He turned to Margaret, and said, in a low voice, "You do not mind my going ?"

"I like you to go," she whispered.

The doctor left the house with him.

"Talk to the poor boy, Mr. Dalrymple," he said ; "don't let him brood over his sorrows."

"I will talk to him, sir, and I have news to tell him which may interest him, as the Oakleys are such friends of his."

"What news ?" asked the doctor.

"Can you spare Margaret to me ?" he smilingly asked.

"Margaret Oakley ! really ! I am so glad ! May you be happy !" exclaimed the doctor, earnestly, and as he wrung his hand warmly. "I am glad to have heard *one* pleasant thing this dreadful day."

CHAPTER X.

WE must pass over a few months and find in the rectory a busy scene. In the autumn Gilbert Archer is coming to claim his bride, and it has been decided that on the same day Edward and Margaret should be united, so activity was the order of the day, and whether at the rectory or with Janet Hastings, Marion was busy with her preparations.

Her own little fortune only sufficed to purchase a very simple trousseau, but she had many useful presents from loving friends, for all were interested in the orphan girl who had passed almost all her young life among them, and who was now to leave her home for the duties and trials of a wife.

The plan for the young Dalrymples was now altered. Instead of remaining at Holmdale as curate to his father-in-law, Edward was about to undertake to assist the minister of an English chapel in a foreign

country, and it was decided that Ronald should accompany the young couple. This entire change of air and scene, and the absence of all painful associations, it was hoped would work wonders for the failing boy, and Margaret would be as a sister to him.

"You will get well, Ronald, I am sure," said Lucy Oakley to him one day while they were in her garden working together; "you must not think of being ill; I want to see you as strong as you were when first you came here, and looking bright and happy."

"I am sure I ought to look happy with such dear kind friends," returned the grateful boy; "but somehow I feel so old and sad, as if I never could shake off the load, and be as young as you are, Lucy."

"You are four years younger than I am," said Lucy, "and you will learn to feel young again in the bright sun of Italy. Oh, how I wish I were going with you," she exclaimed soon after; "Helen Dalrymple speaks so rapturously of the deep blue sky and the pure air and the wild flowers; I think I should go mad with delight if I were there."

"Then I hope you will stay at home, little Lucy," interrupted her father, who, on his way to the garden gate, had come up to them unperceived; "you must be content to remain at home, for what should we do without you? It is bad enough to lose Margaret."

"Dear papa, I would not leave you, as long as you want me," cried Lucy, affectionately. "I don't think Agnes could make your tea or get your slippers so well as I can, so I must be content with Ronald's letters. You will write to me, Ronald, all to myself, will not you? and tell me all about everything?"

Her father passed on his way. Ronald laughed as he promised her to write often and describe the scenery she so longed to behold, and Lucy loved to hear even that slight laugh again.

"But I shall not like leaving you, Lucy dear; you are like a sister to me. I mean," he added, hesi-

tating, "that you are all like dear sisters, but it seems as if you were more especially mine—you are nearest my age, you know."

What means the expression on Lucy's face as she looked at him while he spoke? What mean the tears that glisten in her eyes as she answers,

"Be my brother, Ronald; my own brother of your age is in heaven," and she put her hands on his shoulders, and tenderly kissed his brow.

They said no more then, those children, for Ronald was a child in years, though sorrow had made him feel prematurely old; yet Lucy was almost a woman, and there was much of woman's tenderness in the love she felt for the lonely boy: and they went on tying up the flowers in silence.

At length the important day dawned. The October sun shone brightly, and a clear blue sky above them showed to advantage the happy party which issued from the rectory gate.

There was no need of carriages, for a side gate from the garden opened into the churchyard, very near to the principal entrance.

Mr. Oakley had shrunk at first from the effort of performing the ceremony; but so urgent were the entreaties of both the girls, that at length he yielded, and, leaving to his son the duty of giving away his beloved Margaret, he was ready within the rails to do his trying share of the duties of the day.

Mr. Hastings, at Marion's earnest entreaty, acted as father to her on the occasion; and Janet, with Helen Dalrymple and Margaret's two sisters, shared between them the important office of bridesmaids. Janet had begged to be excused; she was too old, she said, for a bridesmaid; but Marion would take no denial, and insisted on having her own way.

"Remember, Janet, darling," she said, with a joyous smile, "this is my last chance; I am going to have a lord and master now, and never my own way again—it must be if Gilbert pleases afterwards!"

"Well, this once then," said Janet; "there will be

no one to laugh at the poor old bridesmaid's grey hairs."

"Laugh at *you*, Janet? Who is there on earth who could do such a thing?"

Janet laughed herself as she replied,

"There are some people who ridicule everything that is not exactly to their own taste; but, however, we shall all be friends at your wedding, so I will submit to be dressed like those three pretty girls if it will give you pleasure, my own Marion."

And though Janet Hastings had called herself old, yet, from the becoming dress she was obliged to wear—the wreath of roses and long veil, together with the flush of agitated feelings which brightened her face—none, who had not previously known her age, would have guessed it then.

The rector bore up bravely; and gave the happiness of the two fair brides into the keeping of their husbands, without betraying the deep emotion which he would *not* allow to shake his frame; and all the others behaved in the most proper manner. A few tears, perhaps, were unobtrusively shed; but those who felt the deepest—Mrs. Oakley, at parting with her first-born, and Janet, in her anxiety for her friend—were grave, and the quietest of all.

Soon it was over; the wedding breakfast was duly done, and the brides prepared to set off with their husbands, to begin life afresh, far from their former homes.

Only for a few days were Edward and Margaret to be absent, ere they should return to take charge of Ronald, and bid adieu to their beloved families before their departure for Italy; but Marion was to enjoy a fortnight at the sea-side, and then proceed at once to her London home.

Of course, Gilbert hopes soon to achieve a grand reputation, and to have more patients than he can well attend to; but, as yet, he is only the assistant to Mr. Gregory, and his income is small.

It was important that their dwelling should be

near to that of his chief; and this was in a neighbourhood where house-rent was expensive. After much debating, therefore, of the advantages and disadvantages of the scheme, Gilbert and Marion had decided that it would be more economical to take furnished lodgings for a time, and be spared the trouble and expense of housekeeping, till they could afford it better. Two good-sized rooms, in a pleasant situation, they decided, were better than small rooms in a poor street, with the house to themselves.

Mr. Gregory had been most kind, and had insisted on the young couple paying him a visit, while searching for lodgings; and Kate was delighted to have this opportunity of becoming intimate with the fair young bride—often, perhaps, if truth must be told, rather more often than the newly married pair desired, she would accompany them in their walks in search of apartments. At length, they found some which bade fair to be all that was possible under the circumstances; and a week after their arrival in London, they entered the drawing-room which was now to be their home.

It was a pretty room on the first-floor, looking out into a small square garden, whose blackened trees, and dark sodden turf, strove to beguile the mind with thoughts of the sweet country.

The bedroom was on the same floor, looking on to leads, and with a goodly array of stabling in the background. But the house was clean, and as airy as you can find in London; and the furniture, if not so handsome or so plentiful as Marion would have chosen, was yet neat and stainless: and her clever brain soon devised means of so arranging it as to give it a look of home. And a newly married woman, who loves her husband, and who married him from affection, and not for rank, or station, or riches, is easily pleased with any home that she may share with him.

So the wedding presents were arranged prettily about the room—the inlaid workbox, and tasteful

writing-desk, the fancy French stool, the glass and china ornaments, and, more valued than all, the cottage pianoforte, the gift of Mr. Oakley to her whom he loved almost as his own child. There was also a little ornamental bookcase, full of presents from her various friends, who could not afford more sumptuous gifts, but who wished her to remember their love; altogether, the room soon lost its lodging-house air, and looked, in reality, like a home.

And now came the first trial: that which many a young wife feels bitterly, though it is so necessary and so common that she does not mention it—the long day, after her husband is gone to his business.

At nine o'clock, on the first morning after they were established in the square, Gilbert was obliged to leave his bride; and even the hour of his return to dinner was uncertain. "It must be left," he said, "to Mr. Gregory, and the requirements of his patients." So Marion had the prospect of passing the day alone.

She set to work busily; continuing to unpack and arrange her things, determined not to feel dull. Then she wrote a long letter to Janet Hastings, and then Kate Gregory came in to see how she liked her apartments; and thus, with the addition of a long visit from her landlady, Marion found that the evening was drawing in.

The landlady told her all she knew about the other lodgers, and all her own history, as it seemed to Marion, though, doubtless, it was only the part which it was most pleasant to tell.

The house was large. There was another room on the side of the landing opposite to Marion's sitting-room, occupied, the landlady told her, by a married couple, of the name of Lysons. The gentleman was an artist, and got his livelihood by teaching, as well as by the sale of his paintings, and they had one little child, of about three years old. Their bedroom was on the floor above, where lodged also a young lady—a teacher of some sort—very quiet and respect-

able—who only occupied one room, but to whom Mrs. Lysons was very kind. Then, downstairs, she said, there lived a gentleman, who seemed as if he were an author, for he spent the greater part of his time in writing; and, she added, “He is the quietest gentleman anybody could wish to have in a house. He has the plainest dinner imaginable, and often only bread and cheese—and, would you believe it, ma’am? he never drinks a drop of beer, or wine, or anything of the sort; he is a regular teetotaler, it seems to me—and yet he seems to enjoy very good health!”

Marion had not spent so many months with the Oakleys for nothing; so she replied,—

“Perhaps his abstinence is the cause of his good health.”

“Well, ma’am, I suppose everybody had better do as they like. For my part, I should not feel well if I went without my beer at dinner and supper; but I never drink spirits, nor my husband either—at least, very seldom,” truth obliged her to add. “But I get a lecture about drinking, now and then, from our other lodger—one I have not told you about yet—the nicest old woman you ever saw in your life, ma’am, only she is scarcely ever at home: she goes out as sick-nurse; and every one likes her so much. But you could not get that woman to touch a drop of spirits, if she felt ever so worn out, with sitting up at nights with sick and dying folk; she shudders at the bare word, and talks so seriously about it, that I declare my beer always tastes almost sour, after I have been with her!”

“You seem to have a very pleasant set of lodgers—though there are so many of them,” said Marion.

“Yes, ma’am, they *are* a nice set; and, you see, my husband and I think it best to let all the house, except just the kitchens and one small room upstairs, because it pays well, and we shall be able to retire, and live in the country, after a few years more; and if we kept the parlour floor for ourselves, we should

lose Mr. Ramsay's rent—so it is best to put ourselves out a little for the present, you see, ma'am?"

Marion acquiesced, of course: for what could she know about the matter, except what Mrs. Ellis told her? And when this visit was over, she sat down to her new piano: yet, none but plaintive airs seemed to come to her fingers. She was beginning to wish very much to hear her Gilbert's step on the stairs: so she set the door ajar, and listened while she played.

It was getting dusk, and the dusk turned to darkness; there was no light in the room but what the fire afforded: yet there was a gas-lamp on the opposite side of the road, which threw its dingy gleam on the ceiling.

Marion, tired with the novelty of her situation, was dreamily playing, she scarce knew what, when she heard the door pushed gently open, and, turning her eyes towards it, saw a little curly-haired boy, with one tiny hand raised in an attitude of listening, peeping into the room.

"Come in, little one!" she exclaimed; but the child, frightened at having been discovered, ran away as fast as he could. Marion sprang after him, but he was safe in the opposite room in a moment; and Marion could hear him telling his mother that the "lady with the pretty music" had seen him peeping in. Marion would have liked to have followed him, but propriety forbade it; so she returned to her own room to look, for the hundredth time, at her new watch.

Then she lighted the lamp, and placed it on the table where the maid had already laid the cloth for dinner; and she thought how nice it would look when Gilbert should come in. Yet he was not really late when he did come, only she had been unused to waiting all alone; and when, at six o'clock, he came quickly in and clasped his beautiful wife in his arms, she was repaid for all her waiting by his expressions of love.

Accustomed to the abstemiousness of her Holmdale friends, Marion had forgotten to provide any wine or beer for her husband. He laughed at her good-humouredly.

"So you think you can starve me into becoming a teetotaler, do you, my darling?" he said, pleasantly. "No, no; I cannot quite do without a little stimulus! when one has been used to it, it is no joke attempting to give it up. But I will do it in the cheapest way. Here, Anne!—is that your name?—will you mind running to the 'Bell' for a pint of brandy?" and he was pulling out of his pocket some money to pay for it, when Marion cried,—

"Oh, dear Gilbert! send for wine; it is better than brandy."

"Wine, then, this once; to please my little wife! Get me a bottle of sherry, Anne! good—the best!"

The maid was gone, and they went on with their dinner. A feeling akin to pain seemed to strike the heart of Marion. She had such a horror of spirits after the terrible events of the past year in her country home, that she could not bear the thought of her husband drinking them; but he chatted gaily and lovingly, and she could not long feel sad while he was so kind, and seemed so happy.

The wine was soon brought, and poured into a decanter. But even in her honeymoon Marion had never been prevailed upon to taste it, and she now again begged Gilbert to excuse her.

"I am not accustomed to it, you know, dearest," she pleaded; "and, if for no other reason, it would be very bad economy for me to acquire a taste for it, so do you not your own self think I am wise not to begin?" and she took his large hand in her little gentle one, and looked lovingly in his face. He kissed the little hand, and then replied,—

"My pretty wife shall do as she likes, and I will always think her plans the wisest that can be devised; so she shall leave me the wine without giving me the great pleasure of seeing her drink it with

me. But you must not think me extravagant, pretty one."

"Oh, no—not *you*!" she answered, "because you require it. But I do not; so, come, let me peel you an orange!"

And so the evening passed. She played to him—not mournfully, now, but some of her most gladsome airs—and sang to him, or with him, the songs they had often sung together before. Then he told her all he had done that day; and how kind Mr. Gregory had been in letting him go home early; and she recounted all that she had heard about the other occupants of their house, together with the visit of the curly-head to her room to listen to the music—and the evening passed happily away.

The next day Mrs. Johnson and her two daughters arrived to pay their respects to the bride. They had been introduced at Mr. Gregory's house, and though their manners were of a different kind from those to which Marion had been accustomed, she could not reject their civil overtures, but received them with politeness. She had not yet seen either of the young men, or her manner towards the ladies might have been less cordial; for it is wonderful the shrinking sensation which a young innocent girl feels in the company of such a man as Hector Johnson; she knows not what he is, nor what is the cause of her disgust at him, but it is not on that account the less real.

But having only seen the ladies as the dear friends of Miss Gregory, she showed them all her pretty things, and let them try her piano, and made herself most agreeable to them all, so that Miss Julia observed to her sister when they had left her, that "though it was a 'great take-in' Mr. Archer having been engaged before he came to town, yet she certainly was a very nice young lady whom he had married, even though she was so countrified and unfashionable."

Certainly Marion had none of the airs of fashion-

able life about her. The simple truthfulness of her character showed itself in her whole manner: and as she thought not of herself, but how to give pleasure to others in all she said and did, she always succeeded in pleasing.

Other friends of the Gregorys also called on her, so that a day seldom passed when she was quite alone; and though she began very soon to long for the pure air of the country, she never uttered a word to show her yearning; and she loved to walk with her husband whenever he could obtain leave for an hour, to take her to return her visits, or to walk down Regent Street or Bond Street, and look into the gay shop-windows, which presented an amusing novelty to her.

Except on these occasions, Marion never ventured beyond the precincts of the dull square garden, where, in obedience to the advice of her loved friend, Janet, she took a constitutional daily; though she daily learnt more and more to do it as a duty, and ceased to notice the few smoke-dried flowers. Had she been at Holmdale no wild hedge-flower would have escaped her eager eye. Yet the walk kept her in health; and after a time she had a companion in the garden. The little child whose love for music had brought him to her room, had soon ventured there again, and, as Marion loved children, had made himself quite at home with her; and after the acquaintance thus begun, she found herself chatting with his gentle and intelligent mother; and then little Charlie would love to go out with her to the square, and run about in the only garden he had ever known. For Mr. and Mrs. Lysons were poor, and once only since the birth of their little one had they been able to go to the seaside for a month; so Charlie did not know but that all trees had black stems, and all turf was dank and rotten.

Yet was Charlie a happy little boy. No harsh words had he ever heard from either parent; he had, even thus young, learnt not to touch the paints or

pictures, nor to disturb his father in his labours. He was his mother's cherished companion in that father's absence; and now Marion's pianoforte seemed to cause the utmost enjoyment to his infant ear.

The young make friends very quickly; and soon there sprang up a strong attachment between Mrs. Lysons and Marion, the little boy being, as children so often are, the connecting link.

The pale young teacher also would sometimes be persuaded to leave her solitary room, and join the cheerful inhabitants of the "first floor"; and Marion felt interested in her, for she never forgot that the friend she loved the best was doomed to the drudgery of teaching. Thus the dwellers in a London lodging-house, previously utter strangers, from being thus thrown together, began to form a pleasant party of friends, and Gilbert Archer felt happy to think his young wife was not doomed to be alone while he was unavoidably absent from her.

The other lodger, the gentleman on the ground floor, seemed an isolated being. Marion had met him once or twice in the entrance hall in her walks to and from the square garden, when he would open the door for her with a respectful manner. She just observed that he appeared about forty years of age, or he might have been more, for many grey hairs were mingled with the deep black of his head and beard. His manner was invariably grave, like that of one with whom the world had not dealt over kindly—or perhaps it was his own fault that he was now so sad and solitary.

All the ladies in the house owned to a certain degree of interest in Mr. Ramsay; but he kept quietly aloof from them all, and his only friend was little Charlie, who would sometimes run uninvited into his room, but when there, would be received with a kindly welcome till it pleased his little mastership to run away again.

Mrs. Ellis, the landlady, would sometimes look mysterious when speaking of her ground-floor lodger;

but it was suspected that her mystery rose not from her superior information, but from the unbounded curiosity to which, whether justly or not, all land-ladies are supposed to be subject; so no one thought much of what her hints might mean.

CHAPTER XI.

ON the first Sundays after their arrival in London, Marion had prevailed on her husband to accompany her twice to church: but after a while, when he had been there with her in the morning, he declared she must take a walk with him in the afternoon.

"Only think," he argued; "all my time is taken up in looking after sick folk; it is seldom that I can get to church even on a Sunday morning, but if by good fortune I do get an afternoon, do let me enjoy it by a pleasant walk with my wife."

What could poor Marion do? It was a trial to her to give up a habit which she had always esteemed so great a privilege, yet she must yield to her husband, she thought; so they set out for a long walk towards the country.

It could not fail to be pleasant to our country-bred bride to breathe the sweet clear air, and to observe the last leaves which yet lingered on the trees, while those in the square garden had long since fallen.

"In the evening I can get you to come to church again, cannot I?" she asked, almost timidly, as they stood at their door on their return while he took out his latchkey to open it.

"Surely once is enough for my little wife; she is quite good enough already; what can be the use of wasting her time at church?" asked Gilbert, in a laughing manner.

"Well, dearest, you know I have always loved to go to church; and as to being 'good enough,' I hope I shall be a good deal better as I grow older, Gilbert."

And as by this time they were snugly shut into their room, she threw her arms round his neck and said, "We all need to watch and pray, dear one—the best of us is never what you call 'good enough.'"

He laughed and kissed her, then, putting her from him, exclaimed, "Come, come, I have heard one sermon to-day; don't treat me to another, little one; you know if you preach to me at home, I need not go to church at all."

There shot a pang through Marion's heart. Was it thus that every serious word was to be met by him to whom she had entrusted her earthly happiness? But she shook off the unwelcome thought, and replied,—

"Don't make yourself out so irreligious, Gilbert; I know you don't mean it."

He laughed again, and Marion was obliged to retire to her bedroom and busy herself in changing her walking dress so as to be ready for dinner.

The meal was scarcely over before a messenger arrived from Mr. Gregory's; Mr. Archer was wanted immediately to visit a sick person, as Mr. Gregory was out.

"See how wicked people are," said Gilbert as he took up his hat, "they *will* be ill even on Sundays. By the by, it is a pity I was not in church, it looks so well to be called out; I will go with you next time. And what will you do while I am away, my pretty Marion? It is dull for you to be all alone."

"I must do the best I can," she replied; "I must read, and hope for my husband's quick return."

"Good bye, then," he said; he kissed her and was gone.

Marion sent away the dinner-things. She longed to give the servant who waited on them some rest on the Sunday, but Gilbert had rejected her proposal of an early dinner. So she helped the poor girl to clear away, to the great astonishment of the said girl, who thought in her heart that so beautiful a young lady would not be able to do such a thing: and then Marion sat down by the fireside.

She had spoken of books, but she took none in her hand, only sat there looking into the fire.

Mrs. Lysons she knew was gone to church with her husband, and Charlie was fast asleep upstairs, so she had no one to speak to, and her solitary state was just what was wanted to reawaken the painful feelings which had been created by many observations of her husband on that day. She had checked them when first they arose, and she did not like to entertain them now, but they *would* come.

She remembered Janet Hastings' warning words, and wished she might not find her faithful friend too just in her appreciation of Gilbert's character: then she started up hastily, and exclaimed aloud,—

"What a fool I am to tease myself in this way, just because I am tired and lonely, and so ugly thoughts come naturally! I will *not* think of it any more. My own dear Gilbert, I will not wrong you by unkind thoughts."

She opened her piano and sat down, and sang, one after another, the sacred songs she had so often sung while sitting at her grandmother's feet little more than a year ago. And the tears fell softly down her cheeks as, while singing of the Christian's hope and faith, she thought of that loved hand which had been wont to be laid on her head so caressingly, but which was now in the silent grave. Then she began a hymn which told of heavenly hope and joy above, and she pictured to herself that loved one free from old age and its infirmities—free from the worn-out body, rejoicing not in faith but in sight; and her heart felt soothed and calmed. And while thus employed, she scarcely noted how long a time her husband was absent from her. She sang some hymns, too, that were especial favourites of her friend Janet, and the music they loved seemed, as it were, to bring before her each friend whom she valued.

She once heard the house door open, and ran to the top of the stairs. It was Mr. and Mrs. Lysons coming home. After one word of kindly greeting, Marion

returned to her piano, for she would not intrude on that couple, who seemed so happy together in the quietness of their Sabbath enjoyment. So she sang on, till, perceiving that the fire had burnt down very low, after feeding it with coals, she looked at her watch.

"Ten o'clock! And he went at seven! How I wish he was not a doctor; doctors never have any time that is really their own. What can keep him so late?"

But there was nothing for it but patience; so she sat down by the fire again, and, too tired to read, gave herself up to that uncomfortable condition of mind, waiting and watching, with a vague feeling of pain, one knows not for what.

The clock of the neighbouring church struck eleven. It was hard to bear. Forgive Marion, dear reader; this was her first evening of long watching for her husband; besides, she would have felt it less yesterday, but somehow it chimed in with what had crossed her mind to-day, and brought, too, much pain along with it.

With what a feeling of relief she at length heard what seemed a fumbling of the key in the latch; for the street was quiet now, and she could hear every sound. In a moment after the house door opened and her husband's tread was heard on the stairs. Marion was on the landing, and in his arms in an instant.

"I am so glad you are come back," was her involuntary exclamation.

"Yes, I am late," he replied; "I could not get away; the poor fellow was dying, and there was nothing to be done, but the mother would not let me go."

He sat down in the easy-chair and then said,—

"Get me a drop of warm drink, darling; I feel weary with such an evening's work."

"Will you have tea or coffee, dearest?" she asked.

"Oh, I can't take either of them; they do one no

good; you have the kettle there—mix me a little brandy and water, there's a good child," said Gilbert.

She looked at him, and again a pang shot through her heart.

"Do try a little nice strong coffee: surely it will be better for you than brandy, Gilbert dear."

She trembled as she spoke, and he answered hastily,—

"Nonsense, child, you do not know what a man feels when he has been so long in a sick-room; come, give me the brandy, and say no more about it."

What was to be done? Marion had promised to "obey" her husband. With a hand as unsteady as if she had herself partaken of the intoxicating draught, she poured out the spirits, the smallest quantity that she dared, but his eye was watching her to see that he had full allowance, then he mixed with it the water and the sugar.

Happily Gilbert did not observe her distress, for she felt too truly that in his then state of mind it would have made him angry. She brought out a plate of biscuits in hopes he might be inclined to partake of them and drink less of the poisonous draught; and then, taking a low chair beside him, she sat looking gently, lovingly at him.

He had not the look of a man who had come from a sick chamber. His eyes were red and his voice not quite so clear as she had ever heard it; and, in spite of her efforts, the unbidden thought would obtrude itself—is this the *first* glass of liquor he has had this evening? Alas! in truth it was *not*. While in the house of the dying man he had retired to the dining-room, where the ill-judging hospitality of the parents of the dying had pressed upon him some spirits and water, of which they had themselves also partaken. It was this act of theirs, probably, which awakened in Gilbert the desire for more when he reached his home; for he had never before distressed Marion by asking for it, though he had insisted that brandy should form a part of her stores.

When we feel much, how often we choose for our conversation those subjects which are the farthest from our own thoughts! Marion knew nothing, and at that moment cared nothing, about the patient who had so long delayed her husband; but she began to make inquiries about him nevertheless. "Who was he? Young or old? What was he dying of?"

"You ask a good many questions at once, Marion. Why, his name I forget; I am not sure that I heard it. He is young, not much above twenty I should think, dying of consumption. He cannot live many hours more. His parents are both with him, and two sisters seem broken-hearted about him. They are painful scenes, my Marion, that one has to witness as a medical man: they all look at one so, and seem to think one can do something, when the kindest thing is to let the poor fellow alone to die as he must."

"Did he suffer much?" asked Marion.

"Much? Oh, yes; but don't let us talk of it now; I have got away from it, and I want to forget it. Let us go to rest, for very likely they may send to me again in the morning, and I feel tired now."

They did send in the morning, and Gilbert had to spend some three or four hours of the day, with the concurrence of Mr. Gregory, beside the dying youth. For the rest of the time he was occupied as usual in his profession, and Marion was left alone.

The good sleep of the night, however, had greatly restored her spirits, and with the readiness of a sanguine nature, she set herself to the tasks she had appointed, or that her small attempts at housekeeping required, aided, meanwhile, or hindered, as the case might be, by the visits of little Charlie. When all was done, she ventured gently to tap at the door of Mrs. Lysons' room, and ask for admittance.

There sat the painter busy with his work, only looking up for a moment to greet his young fellow lodger; but Mrs. Lysons seemed glad to see her, and began to talk kindly.

"I wished so much to see you last evening, Mrs. Archer; we had such a sermon as I think would have done you good. I don't mean in a *lecturing* way," continued she, with a smile; "but it seemed to offer such encouragement to those who were just beginning the duties and trials of life, that I wished you had been there."

"My husband was so anxious for a walk into the country, he is so tied to his profession, you know," was Marion's answer, "and he was called away soon after you went out to attend a dying bed."

"Ah, I heard! Mrs. Ellis told me it was poor young Mr. Dawson who is dying. What a terrible thing for his family to have him die in that manner!"

Marion felt surprised at the tone in which these words were uttered, so she said,—

"I thought consumption was a very common way of dying."

"Yes," returned Mrs. Lysons, "it is common, and when sent by the hand of a loving Father to take his children to Himself, it is a disease which often shows much of mercy in it: but in this case, having been brought on, I believe, by the poor young man's intemperance, it is dreadful."

"And is that really the case?" asked Marion, with a shudder.

"Mrs. Ellis says there is no doubt of it. He got into drinking habits almost from boyhood, and is now dying of their consequences."

Marion was silent, for her heart was full, and, perceiving that the subject was painful to her, Mrs. Lysons changed it by saying,—

"How beautifully you were singing last night when we came in; if you had not come out and caught us, we should have stood on the landing to listen to you. And you *had* a listener downstairs."

"Had I?" asked Marion, in surprise; "who could that be?"

"When we opened the door, there stood Mr.

Ramsay in the passage, leaning against the wall. I could see by the light of the lamp that tears were running down his cheeks, as if you had awakened painful feelings, and yet chained him to the spot. But when he saw us he bowed, and retreated in double quick time to his own room."

"Well, poor man, if he likes music, I am glad he heard it," said Marion; "he seems to have but few pleasures. I wish we knew who he is, or what he writes; I should like to see some of his compositions."

"He is too close for us," said Mrs. Lysons, smiling; "he evidently thinks that female curiosity is not a thing to be indulged. If he wished to be polite he could easily send us up a copy of the magazine, or whatever it is, to which he contributes; or, if it is an independent work, he still might let us see it. He has no mercy on us, and yet he need not be afraid of two married women. Perhaps it is Miss Welldon who keeps him in alarm. He thinks she might be too much for him."

Here the painter put in a word.

"When ladies begin to talk scandal, they had better change the subject; had they not, Annie? It is a bad habit to get into."

"So it is, you dear good man, and we won't say another word that can be called scandal," replied Mrs. Lysons, gaily. "What a blessing it is to have a husband at hand to warn one against one's faults! He has been trying to make me as good and sensible as himself for the last five years, Mrs. Archer, and yet he has a hard job of it still."

"Rome was not built in a day," returned Marion; "but I wish I were as good as you are, even before further improvement."

"Now take care, or you will have a lecture yourself; for if there is one thing more than another that my husband hates, it is flattery, and he can speak severely about it if he pleases. I often think it is a pity he was not a parson instead of a painter."

"Perhaps," said Marion, "he can do more good as a layman than as a parson, since ignorant people imagine that the latter tries to do good only because he is paid for it."

"We may all do good if we have good principles, and if we will but be consistent," said Mr. Lysons.

"But it is not everybody who has good principles to be consistent with," continued Marion.

"Let us think of *ourselves* and not of others," said Mr. Lysons; "it is easier to mend ourselves than our neighbours, though it may not be so pleasant to see our own faults as theirs; we are always wonderfully clever for other people."

"I am afraid we are not generally too fond of mending our own faults," said Marion.

Mr. Lysons left his easel and advanced to the spot where Marion and his wife were sitting, and then said gravely,—

"My dear young lady, I am forty years old, and you are twenty; may I speak to you as a father would?"

"To be sure you may."

"Then let me beg you not to generalize in speaking of 'ourselves.' It is easy to say 'we generally' are not fond of mending our faults, and to hide oneself under that sweeping phrase; but would you like to say that *you* do not wish to mend your faults?"

"Now really, Philip dear, are you not almost too hard on our poor little friend? What faults have you perceived in her?" exclaimed Mrs. Lysons.

"None," he answered, with a kindly smile; "but still, seeing she is but human, I take it for granted that she must be conscious of *some* imperfections, though we have not discovered them; and I wish her to watch over *herself*, instead of taking shelter under that convenient 'we.'"

"I am sure I am really obliged to you, Mr. Lysons," said Marion; "but now would you please to tell me of some of my faults, and the right way to correct them? I should do it so much better with your assistance."

"You have me there," he replied, "for I must first find out your faults, Mrs. Archer. Now will you forgive an impudent man, whose wife has spoilt him and made him rude and conceited?" Marion laughed, and the painter returned to his work.

"I often think the best way to overcome our faults is to aim at virtues," said Mrs. Lysons, continuing the subject; "if we daily strive to become more spiritually minded, more gentle, more patient, more thankful, our faults will vanish of themselves, the noxious weed overcome by the healthy plant."

"Dear Mrs. Lysons," said Marion, earnestly, "you must help me in these high aims. I fear my life has been too happy a one, and I have been too much indulged, to have thought as seriously as I ought."

"You are young yet, my dear, but it is well to learn betimes the secret of looking to God as our Father, and upon the blessed Saviour as our Friend and Brother."

"I have seen the blessed effects of it in my precious grandmother and some dear friends at Holmdale," answered Marion; "and till I came here, I fancied I could feel just as they did; but somehow——" she stopped and hesitated; she did not wish to show to these new friends the pain that yesterday had struck upon her heart; but Mrs. Lysons, kindly interrupting her sudden silence, filled up her sentence for her: it was the best thing she could do. "Somehow *now*, my dear, you feel that you have begun the world afresh; and in the long hours of your husband's absence and the unavoidable feeling of loneliness that will sometimes oppress you, you are beginning to feel the want of a nearer acquaintance with that Friend who 'sticketh closer than a brother.'"

"How well you understand me!" exclaimed Marion, laying her hand upon that of her friend.

"Because I know the feeling so well. Though my dear husband is so much more with me now than yours can be with you, yet when first we married he was obliged to be away almost all day, so I was early

led to seek the knowledge of one who can never leave me."

"How did you seek it?" asked Marion.

"There is but one way—by prayer, by telling the Lord how far I felt myself to be from his heavenly peace, and how much I needed his presence."

"Oh, yes, I know; that is what my darling Janet is so often saying. How I wish you knew Janet, Mrs. Lysons; you would love her so much."

"I must love Janet's friend instead," returned the elder lady, affectionately, "if she will allow me to do so; and I shall love her all the more when I see she loves my Lord."

Thus they went on in kind and pleasant converse, till after a knock at the house door, the maid informed Marion of the arrival of a visitor, and she returned to her drawing-room to greet Kate Gregory.

What a contrast was the lively, thoughtless, worldly-minded girl to the friend she had just left! Yet Kate was good-natured and of an amiable disposition, and she had come merely because she thought the young wife must be dull all alone. She tried to persuade her to walk out with her, but Marion was resolute to go nowhere without her husband, so the kind offer was refused.

"Have you seen the Johnsons lately?" asked Miss Gregory.

"They were here last week," replied Marion; "they invited me to go to the play with them, and then to go to their house to supper, but I did not like to go. I never was at a play, and I do not think I should like it."

"Not like the play!" exclaimed Kate, in amazement; "why, I like it above all things; and then those suppers at the Johnsons' are so pleasant—unless, at least, Mr. Hector chooses to make one of the party, and then he is sure to get so loud and disagreeable, that if it were not a rude thing to say, I should tell you he was quite drunk."

"Drunk! and at his father's table!" cried Marion, astonished.

"Well, not so bad as he is when out of the house, I believe," returned Kate, "but I am told he is seldom sober now."

"And what do his parents do? Are they aware of it?" asked Marion, with a shudder.

"They *must* know a good deal, though I suppose neighbours are better up to such things than the parties more immediately concerned; but they let him do as he likes: they have never tried to restrain him. I can't bear him," Kate continued; "you have not seen him yet, but I am sure you will hate him."

Notwithstanding the free good-nature of her young visitor, Marion could not help experiencing a feeling of relief when she rose to take leave.

Kate Gregory had not lived in the same sort of moral atmosphere as that which had hitherto surrounded our young bride. There was an appearance of want of feeling, and of incapacity to appreciate any but the lightest subjects of conversation, that jarred uncomfortably on Marion's feelings: yet she did not like to own it to herself, for Kate was most flattering in her attentions to her, and Gilbert had said that he wished them to be friends; and Gilbert's lightest wish was law to her loving heart.

As Marion opened her door for Miss Gregory to go out, little Charlie came running in. "Will you come out and run in the garden?" he asked, throwing his little arms around her neck as she stooped to caress him. "Come and play with Charlie's new ball—only see what a pretty one! Mr. Ramsay gave it to him."

So he ran with her into the next room to fetch her bonnet, and out they went. And an hour in the garden, even in that London autumnal air, sent her back to the house with her own soft colour, and gentle eyes beaming with their loving expression again.

What a blessing is a child! How often does it cheer us, and draw us out of ourselves to share its happiness!

• The cheerfulness which little Charlie had been in-

strumental in producing in the heart of the "pretty lady," as he called her, was further increased by her husband returning home at an earlier hour than usual; and as she sat with him at their quiet dinner, and chatted to him of all that she had done that day, and heard all Gilbert chose to tell her of his own doings, Marion felt as happy as if no cloud had ever darkened her brow. She had taken care to have a supply of good wine in the house, and bore with a smile her husband's remonstrance on her "extravagance," while she replied to it,—

"Well, Gilbert dearest, if you were to turn teetotaler like me, you know, it would of course save a great deal of money: but if you *must* have some stimulant, it must not be brandy."

"What a ridiculous horror my Marion has of brandy! Why should it be worse than wine?"

"It is more intoxicating, dearest, you know it is; and then people get so fond of it, they drink more and more till——" she stammered and stopped, while Gilbert laughed.

"So you really are afraid of my getting tipsy, are you, pretty one? Come, own that such is your charitable view of your husband's character."

Poor Marion's face was crimson, as she said, "How can you talk of such a thing, Gilbert? if you were to become a—a——"

"There! out with the word—a '*drunkard*,'" laughed Gilbert again. "So you really fear that, do you? But now tell me, what would my little wife do in such a case?"

"Die!" And she looked as if she spoke truly.

"My own Marion, don't talk such nonsense, or put yourself in a fright about nothing. I am not going to follow that poor fellow down at Holmdale, I promise you, so don't make yourself miserable."

She threw herself into his arms and burst into tears.

"What—why—what is the matter?" he exclaimed in astonishment; and he petted and soothed.

her as he would a child, and in time she grew calm—the expression of his love did her good; and at last she looked up smiling, and said,—

“You must forgive me, dearest, for you cannot conceive the horror I have of drink.”

“Never think of it, then, in connection with me,” he said; “depend upon it I will take care. But as to going without ‘drink,’ as you call it, altogether, why, it would be the death of me at once.”

“It has not killed Mr. Oakley nor Mr. Frederick,” she ventured to whisper.

“Well, they live in the country, and can bear it, I suppose; I only know that *I* could not. And you imagine that Frederick Oakley drinks only water when he is at Oxford?”

“Indeed, but I know he does,” said Marion, eagerly, “for I have seen his letters, giving such humorous descriptions of the astonishment of some of his friends at his having left it off. He makes a joke of it to them, you know, but to one, a very particular friend, he told all the story of saving the money, and buying Vinum and the chaise, and the young man declared he would go down to Holmdale to make love to dear little Lucy in consequence: for she, you know, is suspected of having been the originator of the plan.”

“Well, let them carry it on till they are tired of it; but I have always been accustomed to drinking something better than water, and I must go on.”

“What a pity children are ever allowed to drink anything else!” said Marion, gently.

“Poor things! What a set of milksops you would have us all to be! But come, put away the wine for to-day, and give me some music, will you, my darling? I am so tired that I cannot sing with you, I fear.”

“I will play you to sleep then,” she said, smiling; and, kissing him as she left her place in his arms, she put the wine carefully away, and sat down to her pianoforte.

CHAPTER XII.

How little Marion Archer knew the commotion which was stirred up by her playing, when heard by the occupant of the room below!

If Mr. Ramsay was writing at the time, the pen would drop from his hand: he would start up, and strike his brow, as if to allay some sudden pain—then walk up and down the room—then stop again, and listen: and sometimes, when he again sat down, it was to bury his head in his hands, and groan aloud. He could never write nor read while Marion played. And yet there was nothing wonderful in her playing. True, she had a correct ear, and that which gives to all music its chief beauty—a most feeling “touch”; and when she sang, her voice expressed the spirit of her song, whether gay or serious, triumphant or plaintive, was the strain she chose.

Yet, to Mr. Ramsay, it always sounded like the voice and manner of some friend long since departed; it awakened feelings of the long-ago, and recalled to his heart the loved and lost, whose memory he was, perhaps, striving to efface from his bosom. For what has a man, who must write for his daily bread, to do with the feelings of the past—unless, indeed, he can weave them into some story, sufficiently disguised for none to recognize the realities, yet so touchingly painted as to win the applause he desires? And truly, the life of this now quiet lodger, in those ground-floor rooms of —— Square, had been one of turmoil and noise—most unlike that which now he led. Sin had held him captive for years. He had lost his friends, his home, his character, his profession; and now he lived a lonely man—the very parents, who once had joyed over their cherished son, being ignorant even whether he is yet alive. Yes, Mr. Ramsay is an outcast! If he die to-morrow, there will be money found in his desk put by to bury him with; but none will wear

even the mockery of mourning for him, for none there are with whom he can claim kith or kin. The hopes of his youth are dead and gone—cut away by his own hand!

Oh, if Marion Archer could hear him tell the history of his life, with more anxiety than ever would she strive to save her husband from the intoxicating cup; for it was drink that had brought about the ruin of this man. Born to competency, and early introduced to a lucrative profession, he had yet been allowed, as a child, to drink freely of wine or beer; a glass of wine had also often been taken, in his presence, by his mother, at any hour of the day, if she felt tired; and though he had never seen *her*, or his father either, in the slightest degree affected by their *moderate* use of these drinks, the habit had gradually been acquired of taking them when he chose; and when released from the restraints of home, he soon discovered a taste for strong drinks, which it was but too easy for him to gratify. He became a decided drunkard. His employers, after vainly endeavouring by argument to reclaim him, had cast him off at last; and his prospects thus destroyed, he returned to his family a disgraced and ruined man. For a time, they upheld him, and refused to believe him to be so far fallen as was said; but, at length, even their patience gave way—the anger of his father burst forth upon him, and he left his home, never to return.

For some years afterwards, restless and miserable, he lived, no one knew how, but often in the most abject poverty—yet given up to his fatal propensity, and seeming on the high road to the grave. And now he had no hope. What right has the drunkard to the bright hopes of the Gospel? He had felt his own unworthiness: the thought of an ever-present God had long been hateful to him, and he gladly took refuge in unbelief of the very existence of that Being whose holiness he offended every moment; and he found some consolation in hardening his con-

science, by likening himself to the "beasts that perish," and in imagining that when this short life was over, there would be an end of all of him for ever. He *sought* the lie, and learnt to believe it, and prided himself on his sagacity and superiority to poor fools, who still went on believing in their own immortality, and their responsible situation as beings competent to choose between good and evil.

Accident—what we call accident, for it does befall us, we see not how; yet the Christian knows *Who* moves the strings, if we may so speak, and orders all—but an accident which was very near being fatal, led to Ramsay's becoming an inmate of a London hospital.

In a state of intoxication, he had slipped over a strip of orange-peel, lying on the pavement; and when he was taken up, it was discovered that his leg was broken. And in that hospital for many days he lay in agony. The evil condition of his blood, consequent upon his drinking propensities, showed itself in the difficulty with which the most skilful surgeons could get the wound to heal; but their low regimen, cleanliness, and the pure air of the ward, so different from that which he had lately been accustomed to breathe, at length proved successful, and the surgeons ventured to hope that he would recover.

Whilst he lay there, racked by pain, a ministering angel daily visited him—a woman, neither young nor beautiful, unless the peaceful gentle look on her worn face might be considered beauty—heard the fearful oaths with which he cried out in his pain—for infidels can take the Holy Name into their lips, to add pungency to a curse—and from his loud impatient ravings she soon gathered the condition of his mind. She saw that this poor wretch, now being rescued from the jaws of death, was ignorant as an idiot of the life to come, without the idiot's excuse that his poor mind cannot conceive of it. And so well did this good woman know the value of the soul thus courting destruction, that, instead of turning

from him with horror, she felt a deep desire to rescue him, and to bring him to the foot of the cross of Christ.

One day, when she approached his bed, Ramsay appeared to be sleeping; the deep dark brows were bent, as in a frown, while now and then a nerve of the face twitched, as with sudden pain. She knelt beside the bed, and there, as a mother might pour out her heart to God in intercession for her first-born, she prayed aloud for him who lay sleeping there. She spoke of his present state of unbelief, of his love for drink, his utter alienation from all that is good; she prayed as if she was confessing *for* him, pouring out *his* heart in prayer, instead of her own; and then she besought the mercy of her Father on the prodigal. "He does not wish to come—he does not want Thy love! He loves his sins too well! Yet pity him—come down and pity him! Oh, leave the 'ninety and nine' who love Thy name, and come after this poor wanderer, until Thou find him!"

Ramsay was not asleep. He had feigned sleep when he heard her footsteps, for she had read to him yesterday from the Book of truth, and his whole heart had revolted against it: so that he had resolved, if possible, to prevent any further attempt of the kind. Her gentle sympathizing manner had often soothed him, but now that she seemed to consider him well enough for her to "trouble" him on religious matters, he hardened himself against her: for his language to his Maker had long been, "Depart from me, for I desire not the knowledge of thy ways!" And he hated to hear of the love of Him whom he had taught himself to deny.

But now, when he heard those fervent supplications—those prayers, as if for life, uttered on his behalf, by a total stranger—pleadings, such as in all his days he had never heard before—the fallen man lay as if spell-bound: he could not speak, he dared not move; though his visitor was addressing a Being

to him unknown, whom he believed incapable of either hearing or answering her prayers, yet, not for worlds would he have interrupted her. His heart beat quickly—he trembled; and, at length, when her eyes, which had been fixed upwards, as if they *saw* the mercy-seat, fell on his face, what was her astonishment to see through the dark eyelashes tears—gushing tears, falling on the pillow! She waited a moment: in heart asked wisdom from on high, and then, without another word—without one word addressed to the wretched man, she softly left the ward, and hastened to her home.

That hour was the beginning of another life to the poor prodigal. The last words of that earnest prayer, “Come after this poor wanderer, until Thou find him!” were never absent from his mind: the unbelief of years, without a word of reasoning, without a hesitating thought, was gone. It was a *real* Being to whom that woman prayed: he felt it to be so; and long ere she had reached her home, he had repeated, again and again, “Come after this poor wanderer—come, come after him!” and while the scalding tears gushed from his eyes, the answer of peace was brought to his heart.

Soon this violent emotion proved too much for his exhausted frame; but, instead of fever ensuing, he merely fell into a real sleep, and when he woke again, lay feeble as a child, yet with a feeling of peace that to him was unaccountable.

How he watched the hours till that messenger of mercy should come again!

When on the following morning the surgeon dressed his wound, to his astonishment the patient bore the pain without a murmur; no oath escaped his lips, only now and then a gentle “Thank you, sir,” while the nurse and surgeon looked at one another with wonder. They had no key to the mystery; they did not know that the proud man’s heart was broken, and the desire after the knowledge of God awakened in him whose life had hitherto been one of stupid

defiance of his Maker. They only saw the result, and it filled them with amazement.

At length the widow came. Gently she approached the bed, her heart raised the while in inward prayer; but what was her joy when the poor penitent reached out his hand and said, "Oh, bless you, bless you!"

She looked at him, and could not but observe the altered countenance, the look of deep anxiety with which he met her gaze. She was unable to speak for a moment, so he began,—

"Is there not something in that book to tell me I may hope for pardon?"

She opened her little Bible, and, on her knees beside the bed, read out the story of the Father's love to the poor prodigal, the coming out to meet him when he was yet "a great way off," the tender kiss and the outburst of joy with which the wanderer was welcomed home.

Again the tears fell fast, and the widow herself could scarcely see for strong emotion; but well she knew that blessed story, often had she read it to poor penitents, and often, after her reading, had there been "joy in the presence of the angels of God."

And now when she had done, with the book still open before her, she began again to pray.

She seemed to divine his feelings now, as she had done before, seemed to pour out *his* heart in words which he would himself have chosen had he known how to pray. He held out his wasted hand towards her, and she raised it between her own till her prayer was done. Then she slowly rose and said,—

"I must leave you now, you are too weak to talk to-day; God be with you, my friend." And she left him to himself, for many poor sufferers in those beds of pain were watching for her coming.

And thus, by the overruling Providence he had so long denied, was this poor rebel brought to his

Saviour's feet. He learnt to perceive the sin which had so long enslaved him, and to accept the offers of mercy with the simplicity of a little child. He *felt* them to be true now, and needed no argument to prove that the religion of Christ is a reality indeed.

Day after day during his long and tedious illness, this ministering angel came. He never knew her name; none knew it in that hospital; but it was written in heaven, and every day she saw more cause to rejoice over the blessed fruit of her faithful prayer.

Poor Ramsay told her all the terrible history of his life: he did not spare himself; and oftentimes she shuddered at his description of the vile scenes in which he had been an actor: and when he said how he had *loved* the drink that had been his ruin, and described the agony it had been to him whenever he had been debarred from it for a short time, she trembled, and said with earnestness,—

"Nothing but complete abstinence can ever save you from falling, my friend; you must resolve never to touch one drop of drink again."

"Never, never, never, shall one drop pass these lips!" he cried; "I would do anything, suffer anything, rather than drink again! Oh," he continued, with vehemence, "if parents did but know the evil they do when first they give wine to their children, they *could* not do it as they do."

"In most cases, I believe, they err through ignorance," replied the widow. "But *our* affair, dear friend, is with yourself: you will promise not to *me* but to Him who can strengthen you to keep your resolution, never to drink again?"

"In His holy name, and seeking strength from Him, I promise to abstain," he answered, solemnly. "Dear friend, you will not cease your prayers for me when I leave this place and begin to struggle with the world once more; but you may rest assured that, whatever be my temptations, *this* sin, at least, shall be one into which I shall never fall. Years

ago all my earthly happiness, all my earthly prospects were ruined by strong drink; but ruin only served to harden me—mercy has found me now, and you have been the angel to recall me to myself and to my God. Happiness for me on earth can never be, but I hope to live henceforth as one who has found the 'right and the true way.' "

At length Ramsay was able to leave the hospital cured of his broken limb, and cured also of that which had been the bane of his life.

Not the poor miserable drunkard carried insensible to be tended by the charity of strangers, but a man to whom all things had become new, he was to depart that day. But whither? Not a shilling had he in the world, no property but the rags in which he had been found by the police when he fell: how, in such a case, was he to live?

This question had often forced itself upon his mind during the long days and nights of pain in which he had lain with every want supplied, and one idea at last got possession of his brain, to the extinction of all others upon the subject. He had not been a reading man. Alas! his terrible vice had early hindered that; but he had talents, though he had hidden them under that load of sin; and it occurred to him that, if once he could make a beginning, he might earn his livelihood by his pen. Many a tale of woe had been narrated to him by the inmates of the beds near his own, for his had been a long period of illness, and the occupants of the other beds had often changed, while Ramsay remained a prisoner, and he thought the experience of some of these persons might be woven by him into tales which might procure him bread.

He had mentioned this idea to his faithful friend, and it met with acceptance in her eyes. She had observed from the style of his conversation, that he had had a good education, though years of sin and folly had degraded him so low. She told him that she was acquainted with a publisher, a Christian man, who,

she thought, might be willing to give his writings a trial in some cheap weekly publication.

"I have no riches, Mr. Ramsay," she said; "my only child is a clerk in a merchant's office in the city, and we live upon his salary together. I dare not rob my boy, but I will go for you to the publisher. Will you trust me to talk to him? May I tell him some of your sad history, enough to awaken an interest in you?"

Poor Ramsay shuddered, then said,—

"Do all you think right, dear friend; it is not for me to dictate to you."

"Well, then, I have made my plan. To-morrow you shall hear if it succeeds; if not—He who brought you here, making your own sin lead to the gate of His mercy, will yet point out to us a way by which you may live."

A beginning having thus been made, Ramsay wrote again and yet again, and after a time he found even more than he had lately learnt to consider necessary for his livelihood coming in upon him.

His ideas enlarged with his income, and the thought of some day again taking a place among his fellow men as anything like an equal became present to his mind.

"Not yet, not yet," he would often say to himself; "I must prove my sincerity by long years of sober toil, before any who have known me will believe me to be changed."

And so he toiled on, and when, as the fruit of his labours, he found himself rich enough to take the parlour floor in — Square, and to have dealings with publishers in a higher walk of literature than that of his first good friend, his heart was full of gratitude to the God he had so long denied; and lonely though he was, yet, with his constantly increasing number of books around him, he felt sometimes almost happy.

When first we met him as a fellow inmate with our Marion and her husband, he had occupied his apartments for nearly two years; yet all the attempts of

Mr. Lysons to cultivate his acquaintance had hitherto failed.

He seemed to keep aloof from all his kind, save that at rare intervals the pale face of that elderly widow was seen at the door, and Gladstone sounded the voice with which he welcomed her to his room: and sometimes too her son, a youth not more than twenty years of age, would spend the evening hours in his company. Thus, with the exception of the frequent visits of little Charlie, who never seemed to interrupt him, whatever he might be doing, his life was spent entirely in solitude.

Charlie loved to clamber on his knees, and make him laugh by saying, "Papa paints, mamma sews, big gentleman writes all day long, pretty lady plays music, Charlie play with everybody."

"And what does Mrs. Ellis do?" he would ask.

"Mitty Elly give Charlie cake—Mitter Elly give Charlie wine."

"Does Charlie take Mr. Ellis's wine?"

"No, no," the little fellow would answer, throwing out his tiny hands as if to push away the glass; "no, no, Mitter Elly naughty man!"

"And what does pussy do?"

"Putty give kitty to Charlie. Kitty cratch Charlie."

"Ah! kitties are dangerous things to play with. Where is your new ball, Charlie? Shall we have a game?" and Charlie would scramble off his knee in a moment to run upstairs to fetch the ball, while Mr. Ramsay ventured nearly to the top of the landing in order to carry his little playmate downstairs on his back. And thus playing with this innocent loving child warmed the heart of the lonely man; and when the sound of music overhead made the little one wish to run away to listen, he always kissed him fondly with a murmured blessing before he let him go. Then he would sit listening to those sweet sounds whose influence over him was so painful, yet so fascinating.

CHAPTER XIII.

CHRISTMAS was a busy season at the rectory; so many warm comforts had to be prepared for the aged or the little ones, and so much beef apportioned to the several families in the village to enable them to keep the happy Christmas time as we English love to keep it.

Every spare hour Janet Hastings was with her friends, plying her busy fingers to make flannel petticoats; and Helen Dalrymple joined them as often as she could; till, before the 20th of December, there were indeed goodly piles of warm clothing in a small room beside the entrance door, where the girls had learnt their lessons in bygone days, but which was now dignified by the name of "Frederick's study." Had Frederick been a woollen-draper the room might have looked fit for him now. But though he had come home for the Oxford vacation, he cheerfully gave up his room, and abandoned himself to what he called "running errands" about the parish or reading to the ladies while they worked.

As we have said, the little room was nearly full on the 20th of December.

On the evening of that day the family were all assembled in the drawing-room. Mr. Oakley had Mr. Hastings to talk to, for Frederick had fetched him in the temperance carriage, and they were sitting on either side of the fire engaged in conversation. Mrs. Oakley's easy-chair was drawn near the table, beside which also sat her son with Janet and Agnes, while Lucy occupied her favourite place at her mother's feet on a low stool.

They were very busy "finishing up," as the ladies called it, and Frederick, with a book open in his hand, from which he had at least twenty times attempted to edify them by reading aloud, sat looking the very personification of amused patience—till at length Agnes exclaimed, "Fred, dear, it is very kind

of you, but you see there is so much to be said about these odds and ends, that one cannot help interrupting you, and you are the best brother in the world, or you would not bear it so well."

"I should be the greatest fool in the world if I bore it in any other way," returned Frederick, gaily; "so there goes the book into its place. You were a worthy man, my good author, but we have no time for your wisdom now."

Then turning to Lucy, and pettingly laying his hand on her shoulder, he said,—

"Now, my pretty Lucy, are you ready to propound your scheme for the amelioration of the whole human race in general, and of the inhabitants of Holmdale in particular?"

She shook her little fist at him, to which he replied by kissing it, and then said,—

"You promised to be the speaker, Fred, you can do it so much better than I can."

"A man speak better than a woman!" cried Fred, "and I speak better than my little Lucy! Why, you can convince any one of us of anything you please, pretty one. So up and tell my father what you wish him to do. Look at him. There is a face that says your request is granted already."

And in truth Mr. Oakley was smiling at his youngest child in a way to confirm Frederick's assertion.

"May I say it then, papa?" and in her agitation Lucy rose and stood upright before her father; "it is Fred's scheme as well as mine."

"Let us hear it."

"You know, papa, there are scores of pounds of beef going to be distributed among the working people, and plums and raisins to make puddings. But Fred and I have been thinking how few of those poor people know how to dress their Christmas dinner. Three or four pounds of beef go to a family: perhaps they are put into a pot to boil, or baked hard at the baker's; and the pudding is not well mixed, and

nothing is so nice as it ought to be. And then——” her speech had got rather long, and the attention of the whole party made her a little shy, so she sat down again to control her nervousness, till a few words of encouragement from her father gave her power to go on. “Frederick and I have been thinking, dear papa, that if we could gain the consent of those friends who have subscribed to help us to give all this away, it would be a much better thing to dress it all here, and give a grand dinner in the barn to the whole parish, that is, to those to whom the beef would be given. And then you see we should keep the men from spending Christmas night at the public-house, if we gave them good cheer all together.”

“Are you going to treat them with ale?” asked Mr. Oakley, with mock solemnity, for he knew his little daughter would as soon treat them to laudanum.

“No, no, you know better than that, papa, we mean to make the dinner so nice that they shall not want any beer; plenty of cold water, or toast and water if they prefer it—and milk for the children and old people; and lots of coffee and tea, so nice and hot, afterwards—and then Mr. Dalrymple’s magic lantern, with the beautiful slides Helen drew in Italy and Switzerland, and singing, and so on—would it not be a happy day for the poor people, dear papa?”

“Are you not afraid of the experiment, my darling child? What will the men say to you when they find you have no beer for them?”

“We should let them know it beforehand, so the drunkards can stay away,” replied Lucy; “but do you not think, dear papa, that if they could have a very nice feast without intoxicating drink they might some of them find out it was possible to live without it, and to *enjoy* themselves too?”

“We can but make the experiment, certainly,” said Mr. Oakley, “so you have my most hearty consent; but I am afraid consent is all you will get out of me, I am too busy to help you in any way.”

Lucy was on her feet again, and looked almost like

that Romish saint we read of, who was seen by his auditors to rise a foot from the ground while he was preaching—for she was so happy that she scarcely seemed to touch the floor.

“Oh, thank you, dearest papa, we will manage it all beautifully! I have sounded the cook already, and settled how it can be done, and Frederick will see about getting the barn ready, and we girls are all very clever at pudding-making, and I am sure Helen will persuade her father to allow us to spend his money in this way, and everybody else will do the same, for they all know that what *you* do for the good of the parish is the very best thing that can be done.”

“What *I* do! Very well, let me have any blame that may attach to the plan, and you and Frederick shall have all the credit. Dress your dinner, and send out your invitations, but do not forget that there are a few infirm people who cannot come out.”

“Vinum shall bring any that are able to leave their firesides or their beds,” said the delighted girl; “and we will take care to send nice warm portions to the rest.”

So the grand dinner was a settled thing, and no time was to be lost in preparations.

Of course the consent of the subscribers was easily obtained, and the people heard of the proposed change with pleasure, though, such is human nature, that, as might have been expected, there were some few grumblers who did not like “new-fangled ways,” as they called it; but these took care that their opinions were not known at the rectory, lest they should have been left out from the party altogether. Some of the men, however, declared that nothing should induce them to attend, till one who thought himself more clever than the rest suggested that they could go and “get a jolly dinner,” and then slip off to the “Anchor” afterwards, and it was decided among them that this course should be adopted.

“It is all stinginess,” said one of the men, as he

sat in the "Anchor," pipe in mouth, and a mug of ale by his side: "they want to save their money, so they starve poor fellows that have to work hard. How would they like to go without their wine, I wonder? But we poor folk that can't get wine are to be teetotalers to please them, because it's mighty wicked to drink beer in a public-house, but quite right to drink wine at home."

"I would drink wine if I could get it, and plenty of it," said a young man, scarcely twenty years of age, who was smoking beside the other, "though I doubt if it's so good as rum after all. But the gentry thinks it is *genteel* to drink wine."

"Let 'em give us wine, then, on Christmas day, if they please," said another, in a coarse husky tone of voice; "I would not mind trying it, for once; and I'll be bound the parson has got some good enough locked up in his cellar."

A sober-looking man had been standing at the door, drinking half a pint of beer, as if that was his daily allowance; he had hitherto been silent, but now he spoke:—

"That is true, I believe, Jack Wilson; I think I have heard that Mr. Oakley has some very good wine, and I have heard, also, what he does with it."

"Drinks it, of course!" growled the first speaker.

"Gives it away to any of us poor folk that are ill, if the doctor orders it—that's what he does with it!" and the man put down his mug and looked boldly round, then continued: "My sister has been housemaid at the rectory these four years, and she says that when first she went there the family all drank wine, like other gentlefolks, but some time last year they all turned teetotalers, and now they never drink a drop of anything stronger than coffee, and they only give away their wine when the doctor says it is wanted as medicine."

"Well, I like folk to go without it themselves before they bother other people to give it up," said the other; "but they are not like poor men, that

have to slave hard in all weathers for their living. I am sure *I* could not work without a drop to support me!"

"Mighty support it gives you, Jack!" retorted the other; "when you can hardly stand after you have been here of an evening. I suspect you would get on a good deal better without a drop."

"Listen to the fellow!" cried Jack. "Here's Ralph Mills preaching to me about not taking a drop, while he is paying for what he has just drunk himself!"

"Well, you can't say I ever take too much!" said Mills; not, however, much relishing the observation of the other.

"I don't know as you do," said Jack; "but you take what you like, I suppose; and that is what *I* do! so we're much in the same boat, I reckon!"

Mills walked off. He did not like to be reckoned in the "same boat" with one of the most notorious drunkards in the village; but what had been said not only disturbed him, it set him thinking; and as he uttered his thoughts aloud, we, dear reader, may have the benefit of them.

"That is mighty like what Mr. Oakley said to me the other day, when I told him I wished I could persuade some of my mates to leave off their drinking habits; he said I could not talk to them to any purpose while I take my own daily pint of beer; they will not see the distinction between moderation and drunkenness! I wonder what would happen," he went on thus with himself, "I wonder what would happen if I just left it off altogether? I have a great mind to try. Fancy a Christmas without beer! How funny it will feel! but then, if I find I can get on without it, drunken Jack can never say I am in the same boat with him again!"

Jack Wilson little dreamed that he had been preaching total abstinence to his mate when he made that remark, or he would have held his tongue, if he

could ; but he had drunk too much—early as it was in the day—to be very discreet in his conversation.

Ralph Mills went on to his work, and in the evening when it was done, instead of dropping in at the “Anchor” for his other half-pint of beer, as usual, he went straight home.

“Here’s father come home!” cried a little boy, running out to meet him; “what have you got in your pocket, father?” for Ralph Mills was jingling some halfpence in his pocket.

“Look here, Tommy; here is twopence: give it to mother to put in her box—the shoe box!”

“Oh! thankye, father!” cried the child; and off he ran to show his mother the treasure to put into the box, in which every odd penny was saved by the careful mother to buy shoes for her little ones. She looked at her husband, and smiled. He was a good husband and father, and always welcome at home; and he *only* spent fourpence a day in beer—which his wife thought, as he did, quite necessary for him to take.

“Come here, Tommy! have you been at school long enough to do a sum?”

And Ralph took his boy on his knee. “Can you tell me how much money I should save if I left off spending fourpence a day in beer?”

It was too hard a sum for Tommy, indeed: but as Mills put it, it would have puzzled wiser heads than his, for he had forgotten to say for how long a time these fourpences were to be saved: but at last he saw his mistake.

“Let me see, Nelly,” he said, rubbing his hands through his hair, as if to help him in the calculation; “in three days it would be a shilling; in six days two shillings; then there’s Sunday, fourpence—two and fourpence a week: we should be all that richer! that’s worth thinking about, isn’t it?”

“Why, to be sure! two and fourpence will buy a great many things,” answered Nelly. “But are you

really going to leave it off, Ralph ? I don't think you can work without it; you have always been so used to it, you know."

"So I have," he replied, "and perhaps I shall miss it at first; but you know, Nelly, there is Peter Hill, the bricklayer—no man in the parish works harder than he does, and yet he has been a teetotaler these ten years, and he seems strong and healthy enough for anything."

"So he does," returned Nelly; "and yet I don't like to rob you of your beer; you always give me all your wages, except your beer-money, you know."

"Well, you *are* a good wife, that's true!" exclaimed Ralph, slapping his wife on the back, in a style more hearty than gentle, "and you shall not rob me of the money. I will give it to that box! and soon, besides shoes, gowns and bonnets and all sorts of fine things will come out of it. Why," he said, a moment after, "two and fourpence a week is about six pounds a year! Think how rich that would make us!"

Ellen Mills looked happy. She smiled as she cut the bread for tea, and jingled the box on the mantel-piece as she took off the tea-kettle; and as Ralph sat down, with the baby on his lap, it may be questioned whether, in all Holmdale, there was a happier couple than they were.

Ellen Mills was one of those wives who stay at home to keep the children and house in order; and now, if her husband added to their income by this saving every week, they would be rich indeed!

Here, then, was the first good fruit of the Christmas dinner at the rectory—even before it took place: may many others follow; and may the benefit of that Christmas feast extend to every family in which this tale is read!

Meanwhile, Jack Wilson and his companion, Bill Crutch, sat tippling at the "Anchor;" and every time they called for another pint they laughed and jeered at the teetotalers, till the time came for shut-

ting up, when the landlord had hard work to get them out; and Jack rolled into a ditch, where the snow lay deep, while Crutch leaned helplessly against the corner of the house, unable to see the plight of his unfortunate companion. The contact with the cold snow seemed in some measure to bring Jack Wilson to his senses; so, after a time, and with horrid oaths, he contrived to scramble out, and the two staggered to their homes as best they might. What happy women *their* wives must have been!

CHAPTER XIV.

THE arrangements for the dinner went busily forward. Tables and forms were brought from the schoolhouse, and some were even borrowed from a boarding-school for young gentlemen in the neighbourhood.

Agnes, Janet, and Lucy were up to the wrists in puddings, while Mrs. Oakley arranged with her cook how all the meat was to be roasted or baked, and there was such a smell of coffee-grinding all through the house! and the large copper in the laundry was filled up to the brim to hold the puddings. Frederick undertook to drive over to the neighbouring town to order quite a fabulous quantity of plum-cake to be made, for they all declared their inability to find either time or room for cake-manufacture.

Thus all were so busy that they forgot to be cold, though the snow lay on the ground frozen hard. "Oh, how dear Margaret and Marion and Ronald would enjoy all this," was the thought which came into loving hearts sometimes; but there was no time to be sorrowful, though Lucy did find a half-hour in which to describe their preparations to her sister, while Agnes did the same for Marion.

It was indeed a busy time. Mr. Oakley took upon himself to send the invitations. This had been

rather a puzzling matter to accomplish, but at last he hit upon a plan which answered admirably. He wrote a kind note of invitation at the head of a large sheet of paper, and below this, a list of the names of all the persons invited. This he sent round by his own man Peter, the gardener, groom, and everything else, with orders to mark off every name after he had read to their owners the note itself, and received their acceptance.

They were all pleased at being thus remembered, and flattered at being sent a written invitation, and many a mother began to prepare the best clothes for her family on the occasion.

The giving away of the warm clothing must not be forgotten; and this took up a half day of Mrs. Oakley's time, assisted though she was by one of the girls. Indeed, the whole party were as busy as it was possible to be, and, we might almost say, as happy too.

At length the day arrived. The joyous bells proclaimed the Christmas morn; and though the skies looked lowering, as they generally do at this happy season, no snow was falling, and everything bade fair for a most successful experiment.

After morning service, which was attended by a greater number of the labouring classes than had ever been seen in Holmdale Church before, a few who could not walk to their homes and return in time, were invited into the rectory, there to rest till the dinner hour.

Dr. Mortimer overtook Frederick Oakley and his sister Agnes as they came out of the church.

"You have not invited me, Miss Agnes, but I do hope you will let me join your party to-day," he said, in an imploring tone.

"I am sure it will give us all pleasure, but you must help us to wait on our guests, dear doctor," she replied, "we have no idle friends with us to-day."

"I shall be delighted, if you will teach me what I am to do."

"Ask Lucy," said Frederick; "she is the life and soul of the party; she will teach you your duty in a moment."

By this time they were in the house, so the doctor offered his services to Lucy, and asked if he was to "carry round the beer?"

"The meat and the pudding you may carry round," she answered, with mock solemnity, "but if you talk of beer, good bye!"

"Oh!" exclaimed Agnes, "would not Dr. Mortimer help to carve the meat? It will be work enough for all who are here; will you, doctor?"

He declared himself ready for anything and everything. He loved that happy and united family, in whose company he always felt a perpetual sunshine; and he made himself a most useful coadjutor in the whole of their present scheme.

The guests were assembled. There was Ralph Mills with his wife and children looking the very personification of happiness; there were Jack Wilson and Bill Crutch with their wives; but though these women smiled and looked pleased, it was easy to see how care and anxiety had their accustomed seat in their hearts. There were many sober men, and the wives and children of some who had refused to come, thinking in their wisdom, poor fellows, that it was a good way to *punish* the parson for trying to make them sober, to stay away from his feast.

There were all the school children, looking so clean and neat in their new frocks made by the young ladies, as rewards for good attendance: there were old men and women who just hobbled up from their homes, and, creeping in behind one old woman, came the poor little child of the drunkard James Evans, the husband of the once neat and happy Susan.

While Lucy was giving this poor little one a plate of meat and potatoes, she stooped to cut it in small pieces for him, and found time to whisper,—

"Where is your mother, Jemmy?—why is she not here?"

“Mother’s in bed, she could not get up,” said the boy, in a dull tone.

“Is she ill?” asked Lucy.

The child looked straight forward, while he answered,—

“She says she shall die soon, and she’s glad of it.”

Poor child, he knew not the meaning of his words, and set to work at his dinner with the ravenous appetite of a person who is half starved, and Lucy saw it was vain to ask him any further questions. But the tidings made her heart heavy, and it was some little time before she could recover her joyous spirits. Yet was she wanted everywhere, as she and all who waited on the guests had enough to do. They *did* eat to be sure! but there was sufficient for all, and the kind intention of sending portions to the sick and bed-ridden was faithfully executed, and the young Oxonian, forgetting all the conventional gravity and reserve which marks his University, conveyed to them in the pony carriage the warm and inviting food. It was a happy day. The puddings were excellent, and the jugs of water and toast-and-water in great request.

It was amusing to see the wry faces of some of the men while refusing the offered beverage as civilly as they could, but more partook of it than had been expected or hoped.

At the end of the repast hot coffee was handed round, and tea or milk for the little ones.

After this, the meaning of the large white sheet which hung at one end of the room became apparent, for Mr. Hastings, on whom that duty had devolved, exhibited the beautiful Italian and Swiss views from the magic lantern, and in a few short sentences described the scenery, so new to all who gazed.

Well read, and of a vivid imagination, Mr. Hastings was just the person for such an exhibition; he had a story for every picture, short, and to the purpose. The dangers of the mountain pass, the riches of the grassy valley; the simple faith of the peasants, or

the mistaken yet often sincere belief of the poor Romanists; the crosses which mark the spot where a traveller has perished in the snow; the noble dog striving to rescue one who has lately fallen; the shepherd leading his sheep down the steep rocky torrent-bed, going before them, and calling to each by his name to encourage their dangerous descent;*—he made them understand or think they understood it all, he made them feel a love to those foreign brothers such as they had never felt before.

He ended by a view of the plains of Bethlehem and the watchful shepherds alarmed by their heavenly visitant; and a light was so contrived that it appeared shining from above as out of heaven, and after Mr. Hastings had told the touching story, the voices of his daughter and her friends were heard singing the gladsome chorus, "Glory to God in the highest, on earth peace, goodwill towards men."

The people stood astonished and affected, and when, their chorus over, the ladies began the verse which many of them knew full well, "Praise God from whom all blessings flow," young and old with one accord joined in the strain, till the old barn rang again.

At this moment Jack Wilson and his mates winked at each other; now was the time to "make a bolt of it" while the others were singing, and they began stealthily to creep towards the door, the little gate in those great barn-doors, which was the only means of exit.

Alas for their project! Frederick Oakley observed the movement; quick as thought he sprang from the place where he was standing, and took up his position, leaning with apparent carelessness against the closed door, but in reality prepared to defend his Thermopylæ against all comers. A muttered oath from Wilson, and scowling looks passing between the men, showed their displeasure; but there was nothing to

* The author has witnessed this exact verification of the Saviour's words, as given in John x. 3, 4.

be done, for of course they could not ask Mr. Frederick to move to let them pass. So there they remained prisoners, and with an uncomfortable conviction that the movement of Frederick was intentional, and that they were doomed to stay in the barn till it should please him to let them out.

After a little more singing, one of the school children, a petted child, whispered to Lucy Oakley to ask to see "that pretty picture of the sheep" once more. The request was put to the vote by Mr. Oakley, and the desire for a repetition appearing unanimous, Mr. Hastings had again to light his lantern, assisted by Dr. Mortimer, for Frederick dared not leave his post, and to begin his exhibition again. Another and another slide was desired, till the whole series was again completed.

Then there was a bustle and a move, and the ladies and gentlemen, all except the rector and Mrs. Oakley, disappeared through the doorway, Frederick opening it for them with a lively smile.

"I am sorry I cannot help you, dear," he whispered to his sister Agnes as she passed hand in hand with Helen Dalrymple, "but I am keeping guard and robbing the landlord of the 'Anchor.'" She smiled lovingly, and the party soon returned bringing baskets full of cake ready cut up, some servants following with large cans of coffee and milk.

How warm and refreshing the coffee smelt! Soon the tables were covered by the plentiful supply, and every one began to eat and drink again. So the evening passed.

Mr. Oakley of course made a speech to his guests, and told them of his deep interest in their welfare both here and hereafter.

He asked them whether their dinner had been distasteful because no intoxicating liquor had stimulated their appetites. He depicted, in brief but strong terms, the misery of the drunkard's home; he *touched*, but he could only touch, upon the horror of the drunkard's death. And then he showed the blessings

of sobriety, and the duty of all of us to strive by every means in our power to check the fearful evil of drunkenness in all around us. The women for the most part gave good heed to his words, and some of the men seemed touched for the moment: but they were unprepared for the close of his harangue.

Warming with his subject, the good rector raised his voice, and said,—

“One thing I desire to see in our village before I die: I want to see the ‘Anchor’s’ sign taken down and burnt upon the green—I want to see the landlord of the ‘Anchor’ earning his living in a coffee-shop, doing good to his fellow creatures instead of getting rich by encouraging their sin—I want to see the fathers of my parish where fathers ought to be, enjoying their evenings at home with their children—I want to have it said of Holmdale ‘there is no drunkard there!’”

There was a murmur of applause from almost all assembled there: then the rector bade his friends good night, and they saw that it was time to go. They sang the evening hymn, and after it the Christmas song of joy, and then, with many a blessing on their good clergyman, and all his family and friends, the happy guests departed to their homes.

Alas! not all to home. The “Anchor” stood in the way, its bright lights blazing over the road; and those who had sought in vain to break away before, now hurried in to murder body and soul in enriching the landlord.

“Come in, Bill Crutch. What! are you going home?” cried Wilson, in amazement, as his companion shrank away from his side, and seemed inclined to follow his young wife, who, with her baby in her arms, was walking slowly on. “Why, Bill, be you going to turn teetotaler? Don’t be such a fool; it’s all very well for the parson to talk, he’s paid for it.”

“Well, I don’t know but he talks right for all that,” returned Bill, “so I *am* going home just for once.”

We will not repeat Wilson’s oaths, but he was not

going to give up his mate so easily; men always like partners in guilt, so he held the young man firmly by the collar. "I say, Bill, take one pint just to warm you a bit, and then go home if you like."

Bill was a weak young man, and he yielded to the tempter.

One glass! But when that was drunk, there was the desire awakened for another!

The poor wife waited outside the door; but she waited long, and at last gave it up in despair, and, shivering, sought her home.

The warm comfort of the happy day she had spent was all lost upon her now, she had stood so long in the cold night air, and she saw that her husband would stay drinking there till the hour for turning out should arrive.

"One drop!—only one!"

Yet the dinner had been a success. It had made many happy. It had shown the people how earnest were their superiors in worldly station to promote their good; and it showed to all who would admit the truth, that it was possible to be happy and cheerful, nay to enjoy themselves *thoroughly*, without beer or spirits to create unnatural mirth.

That Christmas day was a bright spot in the memory of many through all the following year.

CHAPTER XV.

WHILE this happy party was going on at Holmdale, Marion Archer was far differently engaged.

Her husband had insisted on her accepting an invitation to a grand dinner-party at Mr. Gregory's; and though she grieved at such a method of spending the joyous Christmas day, she had nothing for it but to obey. Behold her, therefore, preparing for the visit.

A dress of white muslin, which loving hands, at

Holmdale, had embroidered with shades of scarlet wool, was a fitting garment for one so young, even at that season of the year. On her head, contrasting well with her fair silky hair, was a wreath of holly berries, with their dark green leaves.

While he stood watching her as she put this on, her delighted husband could not restrain the expression of his admiration; but there was no vanity in Marion's heart: and while she thought he only admired her, because he loved her, it was a delight to her to hear his words, though she laughed at them, too. At last she was ready, before the carriage, which he had ordered, came to the door.

"You must just bid your friend, Mrs. Lysons, good night, my Marion," said Gilbert; and he gently tapped at the sitting-room door as he spoke.

"Come in," was spoken; and they entered.

It seemed a shame to disturb that group. Mrs. Lysons was seated on the sofa—his boy upon his knee—while his wife, on a low chair, on which she often loved to sit beside him, at his easel, was reading aloud that old, old story, still for ever new, which first we heard, as little Charlie heard it now, with moistened eyes and wondering heart: and which yet comes to us with a new beauty, every time we read it—of the wondrous Babe, who was laid in his manger-bed, because there was no room for Him in the inn.

"Oh, I am so sorry we have interrupted you!" cried Marion. "We only wished to say 'Good night!'"

But by this time the child had left his father's knee, and was looking up at the "pretty lady" for a kiss. She did look beautiful: and, somehow, Mr. Lysons divined why Gilbert had brought her to them; and as he looked at her with friendly admiration, he said, "She is indeed a 'pretty lady': I wish I had you on canvas, Mrs. Archer—just as you are now—amused at our admiration," he added, smiling.

"You must not flatter me, Mr. Lysons," she said; "I hate flattery."

"Admiration is not flattery," answered the painter; "and beauty is a gift, like all other gifts, to be used to the glory of the Giver. So you must let us look at you with pleasure."

Gilbert laughed a happy laugh, as he said,—

"I brought her in, that you might see how beautiful she looked; and I am rewarded, Mr. Lysons. But pray forgive us for having interrupted you. Good night—and good night, little happy boy."

Mrs. Lysons kissed her young friend, and whispered, "I hope you will come back, looking as happy as you do now, my dear."

It was a simple wish, with no hidden meaning in it; but it struck a chord in Marion's heart, that had been very ready to ache that day, and it gave a little pain. She wished she might have formed one of that happy family party; but the wish was instantly checked, and taking her husband's arm, she left the room.

Carefully Gilbert wrapped the cloak around her, saying, "I must take care of my hothouse flower; but I must try not to look so proud of you, Marion, or people will think me a fool."

She laughed; and they were soon at Mr. Gregory's door.

It was a brilliant party. The dresses were gay; and each lady, doubtless, thought herself handsome: yet, on the door being opened to usher in the fair young bride—timid, yet striving with all her might not to look so, and without one thought of her own beauty—every eye was turned upon her with admiration. But Marion saw none of this. She was glad when the greetings were over, and she might sit down beside one of the Misses Johnson in quiet.

Soon the dinner was announced. The room so well lighted, and adorned with flowers and evergreens, in honour of the season, presented a gayer scene than Marion had often beheld before; yet, in spite of herself, her mind would often recur, either to the feasting in the rectory barn, which she had so longed to

attend, or to that quiet room she had lately left; and though she smiled and talked when her neighbours insisted on it, her heart felt sadder than it was wont to feel.

The wine went round. The choicest wines, of course, and the most expensive. Many a poor family would have been made happy by the price of those bottles of wine, so heedlessly consumed; and the faster the wine flowed, so much the faster went the tongues of the guests. Twenty-four people, almost all talking, each to his neighbour: it was bewildering to poor Marion; and though her husband had warned her, that it was not the custom for husbands and wives to notice one another at a dinner-party, she could not help, occasionally, snatching a glance at Gilbert, and she saw, to her great distress, that his cheek was becoming flushed, and his eyes unnaturally bright, and his voice more loud than usual. But it was so with all the party; they were not what we might call *drunk*, but all had taken wine enough to quicken their pulses, and excite their spirits.

As the noise around her increased, Marion became more and more serious: she could not enjoy such a scene, for she had learnt that life was given us for higher doings than eating and drinking: and her heart ached. She was glad when they left the table, and adjourned to the cool drawing-room in comparative quiet. She found talking an effort, but much of it was monopolized by the young ladies around her, though it was difficult for her to enter into their frivolous conversation.

At last, some one proposed music.

"Mrs. Archer sings," said Kate Gregory; "but it would be a shame to let her sing before the gentlemen come in—she does it so beautifully." And she, good-naturedly, sat down to play a lively air.

The sound of music, of course, soon brought some of the gentlemen into the room. Marion watched for Gilbert: one after another came, till nearly all were assembled—yet her husband did not appear.

The music went on, and Marion was pressed to sing. How could she without Gilbert to encourage her?

"Could you excuse me to-night, dear Miss Gregory? I don't think I should sing well," she pleaded.

But Kate would take no excuse.

"Join us in a glee," she said; "that is a good beginning."

And Marion was forced to comply.

At length, she saw her husband enter—the very last—with Hector Johnson. She shuddered. This was the first evening on which she had seen that young man, and his appearance had revolted her innocent heart, and now she saw him the chosen companion of her husband. He walked away into a corner, and Gilbert sought his wife.

"I am glad you are singing—that is right," he said; but his voice was not quite steady, and his breath smelt so strongly of wine, that, for the first time in her life, Marion involuntarily moved a little farther from him. He did not observe it; he talked loudly and applauded the music in a manner less gentlemanlike than was his wont; and poor Marion learnt, for the first time, what it is to sing for company with a heavy heart.

Glad enough she was when permitted to retire from the piano, and take refuge on a sofa. Mrs. Johnson soon joined her there.

"Delightful party this, is it not, Mrs. Archer?" flirting her splendid fan. "This is the way to enjoy Christmas—Mr. Gregory is always so hospitable."

It was hard for Marion to answer such commonplace remarks; but she did her best, and Mrs. Johnson thought her vastly entertaining, because she let her have all the talk to herself, merely assenting to everything her garrulous companion said.

At length the company began to depart. How glad our young bride felt! She watched for her husband—trying to catch his eye. He was talking to Hector Johnson, who had his hand upon Gilbert's

arm: it seemed to her like pollution, and she shuddered almost as if it had touched her own. For was not her husband only the dearest part of herself—the part she looked up to and clung to, and for whose honour she felt most jealous? At length he came to her: they took leave of their host and youthful hostess, and entered the carriage. But what was Marion's dismay, when she perceived the odious Hector entering it also! He apologized, in a manner which was to her unintelligible, for this intrusion; but it had evidently been arranged beforehand with her husband.

"Mrs. Johnson has no room for Mr. Hector in her carriage," said Gilbert, "so I am sure it is a pleasure to you, Marion, to help him on his way home."

She murmured her assent, and felt relieved when they stopped at their own door. She bowed coldly to Hector; but what was her horror when she heard her husband say, "I will be with you in a moment," as he led her into the house.

"Can you find your way upstairs without me, my love?" he said, "I am going out for a few minutes."

"Going out, Gilbert! Where are you going? Why do you go with that man?" she exclaimed, without waiting to consider the meaning of her words.

"And why not?" was his reply, not in the loving tone she was accustomed to hear. "Why may I not choose my own friends? Go to bed: I shall soon come in."

In her distress she clung to him so closely that he could not avoid leading her up to her room.

"There, go in, and don't look as if you would eat me, pretty one," and before she could answer he was gone.

She heard the door close after her husband: it had a dull dead sound, and seemed as if it were shutting peace out of her heart for ever.

What had happened, that he should leave her thus? She tried to fancy some sick person wanted

him ; but if so, he would have told her ; and he had spoken of Hector Johnson as his " friend " ! There was nothing to show her why he went : she only knew that he was gone.

Poor girl ! For three months only has she been a wife, and sorrow has already begun for her !

She sat down mechanically beside the grate ; the fire was gone out and the room was cold, but Marion heeded nothing of all that ; she felt stupefied, stunned. The farewell wish of Mrs. Lysons rang in her ear again.

" Happy ! oh, can I ever be happy again ? " burst from her at last ; and, roused by her own voice from her state of stupor, she laid her head against the armchair, her husband's chair, and burst into tears.

This brought some relief, and Marion then remembered that her husband would be displeased if he found her still in her holiday attire, so she took off her dress—that pretty dress which her dear friends had made. How little did they dream what she was suffering in it now ! And the wreath her husband had chosen for her, calling her his beautiful queen, that must be laid aside, safe out of sight. She put on a dressing-gown, resolved to sit up till Gilbert should return. She could not read, she could not pray, she scarcely dared to think. The doubts and fears which haunted her were so vague that she knew not herself why she felt miserable, yet miserable she did feel, and thought, as we have all so often done, that any sorrow but this one would be less hard to bear.

Twelve ! one ! two ! the church clock struck the wearisome hours. Marion shivered with the cold, as well as with the agony of her mind. At last she heard the latchkey in the lock : long was it in opening. She ran to the landing with a light, and her husband entered. Was that her husband ?

Alas ! poor wife, this is thy first taste of the bitter cup.

And then he was angry—angry that she had not

gone to bed—angry that she was not asleep ; for he had just sense enough left to be ashamed that she should see him. Meekly she bore his reproaches, for she saw he was not in a condition to be reasoned with. She helped him to undress, and uttered not one word of blame ; but he was angry at her very gentleness, and fell asleep reviling her he loved so well.

Where had Gilbert been ? Why had he left his lovely wife ? The quantity of wine that he had drunk at the dinner party had awakened the desire for more : the profligate Hector had invited him to accompany him to one of those places of vile amusement in which his depraved taste led him to delight. He had at first refused ; but then came the vulgar taunt, which a weak man cannot bear, that he was under petticoat government, and afraid of amusing himself lest he displeased his wife.

Had Gilbert been perfectly sober, he would have scorned it as it deserved, this vulgar jest ; but he was not himself. A longing for spirits came upon him, and in spite of his better judgment he yielded to the tempter. In the place to which he was led others were drinking, all were drinking ; he must do as they did ; and we have seen in what condition he returned home.

There was no sleep for Marion that night. Her weary eyelids would not close, they seemed fixed in unnatural openess. Unused as she was to sorrow—for the only grief she had hitherto known had had no bitterness in it—this blow came upon her unprepared to meet it. The warning words of her friend Janet returned to her memory—they had been forgotten in her happy love for her affectionate husband ; the recollection also of the fate of Captain Archer, which had at the time so terribly shocked her, came into her mind with an agony of dread. All seemed dark around her, and she gave herself up to anguish without one thought of comfort.

No sleep then for poor Marion that night. At last, long before the tardy sun arose, she left her bed

and, slowly dressing herself by the light of a candle, which seemed itself to burn more dimly than usual, she took refuge in the sitting-room.

There stood the easy-chair her husband liked, and her own little chair drawn close to its side, telling of hours of happy love. She sat in the easy-chair and tried to think, for *feeling* had been all night so strong within her that the power of thought seemed gone.

Marion knew full well the *theory* of true religion. The holy precepts of the gospel had long been her guide, and an earnest desire to do right in the sight of God, and to govern all her actions in obedience to the commands of her Redeemer, had been hers from childhood. But she knew not yet the soothing power of the gospel. She had seen it, indeed, in the friends she loved so well, the parent she had lost, and the gentle Janet; but her own life had been so happy, she had dwelt hitherto in such an atmosphere of human love, that she had never felt the need of a present God to be her comforter. Her earthly "cisterns" had been very lovely, and she had not yet discovered that they could "hold no water."

Thus the God in whom she believed, was still to her a "God afar off," and not "a God nigh."

But now her need was come. She was stricken in the tenderest feelings of a loving heart; the husband she adored, and for whom she had left the friends of her youth, had shown himself guilty of a crime against which her whole soul revolted, and she, the young bride of but three short months, felt herself alone—utterly alone in this weary world.

For some time she sat hopelessly gazing on the floor, when at last she rose, and exclaimed aloud—

"Can I not pray? May I not tell my misery to my God?" And she threw herself on her knees beside the chair. Her hands were clasped together, and the aching head leaned heavily upon the cushioned arm. But it was long before the words could come—words that told out her breaking heart; yet

then she prayed as she never prayed before, and gradually she felt the sweet assurance that her prayer was not in vain ; she felt comforted with a confidence in God as her Father and Friend which she had never before enjoyed ; she felt the love of her Saviour to be more than a mere name, and realized, in a manner, the fulness of the promise, " Call upon Me in the time of trouble, I will deliver thee."

And with her prayers came the relief of tears ; the strong feeling of misery was softened, and though that heavy sorrow still oppressed her heart, its agony was gone.

The day began to dawn, sending a faint streak through the closed shutters ; she opened them just as the servant of the house entered to arrange the room. The girl started at seeing her, so, hastily uttering a morning salutation, she hurried into the bedroom to escape those wondering eyes.

Gilbert Archer still slept an uneasy, heavy, snoring sleep, yet she must awaken him : it was past eight o'clock, and he must be at Mr. Gregory's by nine. Timidly she ventured to touch his shoulder, but it was with difficulty that she could rouse him, and when she did, his bloodshot eyes and haggard look struck a chill into her heart. She whispered the hour to him, and he rose. She had put all his things ready for him, for not for one sin, nor for many, does a woman's love grow cold ; and then she retired that she might have the breakfast on the table, so that his attendance at the surgery might not be delayed.

The tears were ready to fall while she boiled the coffee and made the toast, and set the things as she had heretofore done so happily ; but he must not see her weep, so the comforting shower must be withheld.

At last he came in, and she looked timidly towards him. He started. If *he* were changed in appearance, what was *she* ? The sweet soft eyes were red, and their drooping lids were swollen ; the smiling mouth now looked as though it could never smile again, and

a sickly paleness covered the cheek which the evening before had looked like a China rose.

"Marion, what is the matter?" was Gilbert's first exclamation. But then the truth burst upon him: it was *his* doing—this cruel change!

He shuddered and turned to the window, then, coming close to his trembling wife, he said—

"Can you forgive me, Marion? Forgive me and forget!"

He put his arm around her. Oh, how his breath still smelt of the poisonous cup!

She could not speak; her aching head sought the place she had so often felt to be her home, but now it was to hide her anguish, instead of to feel the sweet happiness of her love.

But we will not intrude upon these sacred moments. We may be sure Gilbert's declaration of penitence brought a speedy pardon, and that it was with words of love, if not with smiles, that the husband parted with his wife that morning, and went, with his head aching frightfully, to take his accustomed place in the surgery.

CHAPTER XVI.

ABOUT two miles from Holmdale Church was the ancient residence of the lords of the manor.

It had been a noble building in its time, and an old tower now in ruins, and some ancient mounds about the pleasure garden, showed that a still older edifice had once occupied the same spot. But now for years it had been deserted. The beautiful park, where grew the fine Holm oaks from which the place took its name, was let off to a farmer, who preferred living in a stoutly built dwelling of moderate dimensions to the large and gloomy manor house, in which the smallest

of the kitchens, and one or two similar rooms adjoining, were all that were now inhabited, and these only by an old man and his wife who had worked on the grounds ever since they could remember anything.

It was pleasant for the surrounding gentry to drive about the park and wander in the neglected shrubbery walks, or by the large piece of ornamental water which was dignified by the name of "The Lake;" and many a skating party was to be seen there during severe winters enjoying the cold with all their hearts.

The owner of the place had been for many years on the Continent, having wasted a princely fortune in dissipation of every kind, in which we may be certain that drinking was not omitted; and had not the property been strictly entailed, it had long ago been sold.

The last in the entail had just come of age, poor young man! inheriting his father's vices, but without the means of indulging them with which the latter had begun his downward career; and his first act on attaining his majority was to join his father in cutting off the entail, thus enabling him to sell the estate of his ancestors.

Now it was announced that Holmwood Castle had another master, and the whole village was in a ferment of agitation.

It was said that the new proprietor was immensely rich, and liberal in spending and giving of his abundance. Judiciously considering it his duty to encourage the people of the village, he had given orders that all carpenters and masons who were capable should be employed in the numerous alterations and additions which he contemplated having made. Decorators and upholsterers came down from London to beautify the interior, and everything gave cause for hope that a mighty change for the better was coming over the old castle.

For some time it was difficult for the gossips to

ascertain the precise manner in which Sir Reginald Firewater had become possessed of his large fortune; but at length it was whispered that the new comer, the successor of the ancient family who for centuries had reigned in that fair district, was a distiller—one who makes himself rich at the expense of the bodies and souls of his fellow creatures.

Painful indeed it was to the family at the rectory to hear these tidings, which were not brought to them till a short time before the arrival of the family at the castle.

On the second Sunday after their coming, the large square pew, which had for so many years stood unoccupied, was filled with an imposing party.

Sir Reginald Firewater was a fine tall man, evidently a gentleman and man of the world; his wife a dashing lady who had been a beauty in her day, and who still considered herself one. Daughters, too, and young sons there were, a goodly family to look upon; and they smiled and bowed to the simple villagers, who drew up in the churchyard to let the great folk pass.

It was of course the duty of Mr. Oakley to call on his new parishoners.

"I wish we were not obliged to go," said Agnes, when her mother expressed a desire that she should accompany her parents. "What good can we do them? and I am sure they can do us no good."

The worthy rector looked kindly at his daughter, and said—

"And are we never to pay attentions in cases in which we think we can neither obtain nor impart any benefit, my child? These are 'strangers,' and as such it is our duty to 'entertain' them."

"But there is not much chance of their being 'angels,' dear papa; certainly if they are, it will be 'unawares.'"

"And so it may be, Agnes," replied her father, gravely; "who are we, that we should judge them before we know anything of their characters? We

should always go about with the hope of influencing for good all with whom we have any intercourse: you know that, my child."

"I am sure *you* must influence everybody for good, darling papa," returned the affectionate girl, stooping over him as he sat at the breakfast table, and reverently kissing his forehead; "so I will go with you and mamma, and learn how to do right, and not think of my own fancies."

So the visit was paid.

Sir Reginald was not at home, but the ladies of the family received their visitors most graciously, and were evidently much pleased to find in their clergyman and his wife people of superior manners and education, and they inquired about the schools and various plans for benefiting their poorer neighbours, in a way that could not fail to please those who loved the whole village as the Oakleys did.

They showed their improvements, and changes which are not always improvements, and expressed themselves charmed with the whole country round them, till Agnes herself felt quite inclined to like them, and could not help thinking, with regret, "What a pity that they should be distillers!" and on her return home it would have amused any one more experienced in the ways of the world, to hear how she and Lucy planned an onslaught on the whole system, and the conversion of their new acquaintances, one and all, to the doctrines of total abstinence. They forgot that by this conversion the princely fortune would fall to pieces, and the castle be again left to find another master.

It was but the day following this visit that Sir Reginald Firewater himself called at the rectory.

He said that, having found the house, as he expressed it, almost pulled to pieces for his proposed alterations, himself and family would be obliged to leave it for several months. He expressed himself desirous of identifying himself with his new estate, and doing his utmost to assist the rector in all his plans.

His language was good and his manner pleasant and easy, and on rising to take leave, he showed what had been the real object of his visit.

Opening his pocketbook, he laid upon the table a cheque for fifty pounds, folded so that Mr. Oakley could not see the amount, and said—

“As neither I nor Lady Firewater shall be able personally to assist our poor neighbours at present, you would be doing us a very great favour if you will kindly bestow that sum in any manner you judge most for their benefit: either in improving or repairing the schoolhouse, or almshouses, or in any other way you think best: you will confer on us a real obligation.” And he spoke as if he meant what he said.

Mr. Oakley was perplexed: he was a man of a clear head and quick perception, and was not often at a loss as to the proper course to pursue; but here he fell into a difficulty. There was no time to be lost, for his visitor was already holding out his hand to take leave, as if to avoid any thanks for this generous action.

“Pardon me, Sir Reginald,” said the rector, quickly. “I feel the kindness which prompts your offer, and I greatly, deeply regret the cause for which I must decline to accept it. Pray allow me to return it to you.” And he endeavoured to place the note in the other’s hand.

Sir Reginald looked the astonishment he felt.

“Why, surely, Mr. Oakley,” he said, “you will not refuse to become our almoner when we are unable to be our own! I am asking you to take no additional trouble, but merely to spend the money in the way which you think best. Clergymen have usually enough want in their parishes to render all assistance valuable.”

“We have want in plenty, Sir Reginald,” replied the other; “yet I must again request you to return that note to your pocketbook.”

The rich man began to feel angry.

"What can be the reason of your refusal, Mr. Oakley?" he asked, after a moment of hesitation. "There must be some reason, for you are not a man to act on mere impulse, I should imagine."

"It will pain you—probably offend you—to tell you my reasons, Sir Reginald. May I again request your kindness in taking my refusal as final?" said Mr. Oakley.

"Not unless you inform me candidly and truly of the reason for a course so strange," replied Sir Reginald; "pray let me hear it. I am not easily offended," he added, with an attempt at a smile, for in truth he felt rather annoyed already.

The rector looked at him kindly but sorrowfully, as he slowly said—

"I dare not accept for any purpose, however laudable, that money, which is obtained through the misery of my fellows."

"What do you mean? Why do you talk of misery? The money is honestly obtained, and it is my desire to devote a portion of my gains for the benefit of my fellow creatures;" and the rich man started up from the chair on which he had resealed himself, looking half angry, half puzzled.

"Must I go on, Sir Reginald?" inquired the rector.

"Certainly, sir: let me hear all you have to say on this strange subject."

"It would take hours, days, weeks, to say it *all*," replied the rector, with deep emotion; "to tell of all the misery and all the sin that are induced by drinking the deadly spirit, by the sale of which you live, Sir Reginald. I exhort my people to be sober; I strive to show them, by every means in my power, the horrid nature of the sin of drunkenness. How then could I go among them, and say, 'Here is money to relieve your bodies, but it was made by manufacturing that which ruins your body and soul?' Forgive me, Sir Reginald, for the plain speaking you yourself

desired to hear; and believe that I thank you for the kindness intended, and for the confidence you would have reposed in me."

Sir Reginald Firewater drew himself up to his full height, and gazed angrily into the mild face of the rector.

"I took you for a sensible man, Mr. Oakley, or I should not have come near you. I never heard of such a thing. Because a few miserable wretches choose to get drunk sometimes, I am to be looked upon as a heathen, and my money as too foul a thing to be touched. Good morning to you, sir: I am indeed surprised." And though still without the unfortunate cheque, which lay upon the table, he was about to stalk out of the room.

Mr. Oakley gently laid a hand upon his arm. "Pardon me, Sir Reginald; I do not look upon you as a heathen. I believe that this is a point of view from which you have never regarded the subject. I am not without hope that the time may come when you may see it as I do. Till then, I pray you to forgive me for doing my duty."

"A pretty sort of duty!" said the other, angrily. "Good morning, sir." And he was not to be detained any longer.

- Lucy Oakley had, during all this conversation, been seated in the window, ostensibly employed with her needle; but she had not moved a finger. Her eyes sparkled with excitement, her lips were slightly apart, as she heard her father give, so gently, yet so forcibly, his reasons for refusing the proffered money; and as soon as the door closed on the angry visitor, she sprang from her seat, and, seizing the cheque, exclaimed—

"Oh, papa, let me burn it, it is the price of blood."

Her father gently stayed her hand, saying—

"It is not ours, my darling. I would not spend it for the world; but it is truly, as you say, the 'price

of blood,' of immortal souls. Give me an envelope, and I will send it to its owner by the post."

It was soon sealed and directed and sent off by Peter to the post office; and Lucy felt delighted, yet she checked her joyous expressions on perceiving her father's look of anxiety and pain. "I am sorry," he said, in answer to her speaking eyes, for she uttered no word; "it is a painful business, and may cause contention in our quiet village. They may strive to oppose, with all the influence their wealth affords them, our schemes for promoting temperance among our people."

"Let them oppose us!" cried the young girl, with animation. "I think they will find us too strong for them."

"My own dear child," said the father, fondly passing his hand over her silky hair as she stood beside him, "it does not do to *despise* an enemy, especially if he be rich. Riches are power in this sinful world: blessed instruments for good, fearful ones for evil."

"But what can they do, dear papa?"

"They employ many of our labouring men. They may give them plenty of drink while at work; they may hinder their coming to our temperance meetings; they may even set up a new public-house as a rival to the 'Anchor' and 'White Lion.'"

Poor Lucy put up her hands.

"Oh, papa, don't go on? how horrible! how cruel! But they are going away now, so they cannot do much harm yet, and we must work more than ever to get beforehand with them." And then, with the quick hopefulness of youth, she added, "Perhaps they are not all so bad as we think. Those young ladies look nice amiable girls; I don't think *they* can like to live on the misery of others."

"They have probably never given the matter any attention," replied Mr. Oakley; "it has never entered their heads that their father's business has

anything to do with the misery which drink causes in the world. Probably, too, from their very position, they hear much less of this vice than my Lucy does."

"Oh, papa, I am always hearing of it! Not a day passes, but somehow or other I hear of some sin or some new misery that is caused by drink." And Lucy shuddered, for she had only that morning been listening to a new tale of misery which a drunken husband had inflicted on his family, and she knew that her mother was even now gone on a visit to poor Susan Evans, who now lay upon her deathbed, all through the drunken habits of the husband she had loved too well.

Mr. Oakley saw the cloud upon his darling's brow, and he kissed her fondly, saying—

"Come, my Lucy, let us do our best, and not be miserable about it. The more people reflect on the sin of drunkenness, the more they will shrink from it: so, as you say, even this rich distiller may have some members of his family who may learn to abhor it. What are you proposing to do this morning? Stay at home with your bees, or drive me over the hill to see poor Mrs. Ainsworth?"

"Oh, drive you, to be sure, if you will let me, dear papa. And who is to go with us? It is too cold for the sick folk, but perhaps lame Martha might like the drive, if we wrap her up well."

"Run down to her then, my dear, and tell her to get ready, while Peter puts the harness on Vinum. I shall be ready when you are." And the rector turned into his study, while, hastily putting on her bonnet and cloak, Lucy set off towards lame Martha's cottage to invite her to take a drive.

Martha was ill, and could not go out, so Lucy returned to her father with the intelligence.

"Dear papa," she said, "if you would not mind the trouble of driving, we could call and ask if Mr. Hastings would come, and I could sit behind and jump out to open the gates."

"Let it be so then, replied Mr. Oakley; "Vinum is not very hard to drive."

"No, just tell him where we want to go, and he is as good as a reindeer," said Lucy, merrily, while she held the greatcoat for her father to put on.

Mr. Hastings was pleased at the prospect of a drive, and soon the party were on their way to a farm, whose owner Mr. Oakley had occasion to visit.

CHAPTER XVII.

As they drove through the Old-down fields, Mr. Oakley and his party met Dr. Mortimer.

He was riding even faster than usual, and there was an air of determination, almost of defiance, about him that surprised his friends. However, he reined up his horse on meeting them, and abruptly exclaimed—

"Mr. Oakley, I am going to turn teetotaler!"

"*You*, doctor! impossible! you love your moderate glass far too well."

"True though, upon my honour. You may look incredulous, little Miss Lucy, and think I am talking nonsense; but, as sure as my name is Mortimer, I shall never drink a drop of wine, beer, or spirits again."

"Ha, ha!" laughed Lucy, merrily, "I see the trick now, well enough; you are going to take to porter, treble X, or something of that sort; and you think it so good, that wine, beer, and spirits are cast into the background."

"You little suspicious thing," returned the doctor, with animation; "here have you been preaching total abstinence for the last—I don't know how many months, and now you don't believe me when I declare I am a convert."

"But is it really true?" asked Mr. Oakley,

amused at the vehemence of his friend, and yet, like Lucy, half doubting his sincerity.

"If ever I drink intoxicating liquors again, 'may my right hand forget her cunning,'" said the doctor, solemnly.

All were struck with his manner. Lucy was silenced. She could joke with her old friend, who had often nursed her on his knee, but she felt there was some reason for this sudden change, which it was more proper for her father or Mr. Hastings to meet than for herself.

Dr. Mortimer sprang from his horse, and, holding it by the bridle, his other hand resting on the side of the carriage, said,—

"You know Mrs. Egerton of Bingley, Mr. Oakley?"

"A better old lady is not to be found," replied the rector; "ever ready to do good, and from the right motive of Christian love. Has *she* made a convert of you?"

"She has indeed," he replied, gravely. "You know how deeply she felt the loss of her husband last year. They had grown old together, and she had always been so delicate that it had appeared more probable that he would be the survivor, than that he would leave her here in her weakness. Well, she has seemed in so weak a condition for some months past, that I thought it my duty to order her to drink wine, a glass whenever she feels extremely low. Really, Mr. Oakley, I did believe I was doing right; I could not bear to let the poor thing sink from exhaustion, so I gave the order."

"Ah, you doctors, when will you learn that you do not strengthen your patients by giving them wine?" exclaimed Mr. Oakley.

"I have learnt it now," was the emphatic reply. "I went to-day to see her, poor dear old lady, and she complained of often feeling very low, but that which now distressed her most was an irritability of temper, of which she was herself conscious, and

which she felt to be wrong in one who professed, as she does, to walk by the laws of Christian love with all around her."

"Poor thing!" said Mr. Oakley, compassionately, "many a poor Christian, in certain conditions of the nervous system, has made the same complaint."

"So I believe," said the doctor; "and on this supposition, that it was merely a nervous affection, a part of the cross given her to bear, I comforted her as much as I could: but it never occurred to me that I was myself the cause of it all till after I left her."

"And now?" asked Mr. Oakley.

"As I passed through the hall, the maid Prinsep, you know—that nice servant she has had with her so many years, who nursed poor old Mr. Egerton so kindly, and has been such a comfort to them both—"

Mr. Oakley nodded an affirmative.

"Well, she came up to me and asked me to walk into her own room, that little room near the door, you know it; and then she told me that her mistress always has these attacks of irritability after she has drunk wine; that she now drinks more at dinner than Prinsep considers safe for her, but that after a glass or two taken apart from a meal, she is often so unlike herself that it is painful to witness."

Mr. Oakley looked aghast, as did his companions, and the doctor continued,—

"Prinsep expressed such dread lest any of the other servants should observe these things: she says truly, they are always so sharp to find fault, and then so ready to gossip about everything, that she is miserable, and asked my assistance to undo what I must feel to be my own work; not that she said that, poor thing, she never thought of casting blame on me; but I felt it deeply. She says that if the dear old lady had the slightest idea that it was possible she had ever been other than herself after drinking wine, she would be so wretched, that it would kill her, so she applied to me; and what to do I know not. Of course I shall interdict the wine; but it

must be done so cautiously in order not to give Mrs. Egerton pain, that it is a most delicate matter to deal with. But my first step is a resolution henceforth to eschew all intoxicating liquors myself, and then, you know, on your theory, Mr. Oakley," and here Dr. Mortimer's face relaxed into a smile, "my brain may possibly work more clearly, so that I may see my way better."

"God grant you may!" cried Mr. Oakley, warmly. "It is indeed a painful and difficult matter to deal with. A woman so deeply religious, whose life has been so consistent from her youth upward, now to be, by your account, in danger of becoming a drunkard, merely because she is in weak health, and it is the system of medical men to give wine in such cases!"

"How kindly you put it, Mr. Oakley, off my shoulders on to 'the system'! But I do feel guilty. I ought to have known better. I ought to have profited by your kind counsel, and my little Lucy's lectures; but you will both find me a most willing pupil now. I have done enough mischief, I think."

"Do not upbraid yourself, my friend," said the rector, for he saw how deeply distressed was the excellent man, at the effect of his own kindly meant prescription; "get on your horse again, and take a gallop over the downs; and if you have nothing better to do, come in and dine with us afterwards, and we will talk this over again, over our fine glass jug of water and dessert."

The doctor took his advice, mounted his willing steed, and, after promising to join Mr. Oakley's family at dinner, was soon far away over the breezy downs, trying to recover, by violent exercise, from the shock his feelings had experienced in his visit to his old and respected patient.

"Is it not truly a hydra-headed monster, this 'drink'?" said Mr. Hastings, as they drove slowly on. "In the case of those unhappy Archers, there was no religious principle to keep them in the right path; the love of drinking once begun, there was no

strength sufficient to overcome it; but this is indeed a terrible case—that a person so excellent, so humble, so earnest a Christian, should, unsuspected by herself, and against the reason of her whole being, be in danger of thus ‘making shipwreck of faith.’ If that woman, Prinsep, were not so thoroughly trustworthy, and so devoted to her mistress, one could scarcely believe it.”

“I fear we must believe it,” returned Mr. Oakley; “it is so natural, when a person feels low and weak, if a medical man has recommended it, to take just one glass of wine to support him, and then just one more to finish the work in which the first has failed. So great a horror have I always had of a glass of wine when I was tired—just to give a feeling of factitious strength—that nothing would ever induce me to take it: even all those years when, as you know, I and all my family drank wine at dinner.”

“You were right, I am sure,” returned Mr. Hastings. “How often it is the glass taken for ‘support’ that makes the drunkard! The washerwoman has her gin—and how rare is a washerwoman, after middle age, who is not a drunkard! The haymaker has his beer, not to impart real strength, but to create excitement, to enable him to go on with his labour. I have also known, in my own experience, so many delicate, nervous persons increase their disorders a hundred-fold by these medicinal glasses, that I quite agree in your horror of them.”

“Yes,” said the rector; “one goes through life seeing these things, and hearing isolated cases of misery, and disease, and death, brought on by drunkenness; but when one begins to look at the whole subject, it is frightful to contemplate. I am constantly saying to myself, ‘What! another case of drinking?’ and I now, seeing it as a whole, am daily dismayed at the mass of sin and misery produced by the use, almost always begun in *moderation*, of intoxicating drinks. I go into a cottage, and find nought

but dirt and poverty; I am told that the husband drinks, and, too often, the wife follows his example in desperation. I ask after an old acquaintance, and hear that he is dead—that he drank himself to death, after ruining his wife and family, by neglecting his affairs. I ask for the son of another old friend—he is ‘lost,’ no one knows where he is—perhaps enlisted as a common soldier in a regiment in which he should have been an officer—perhaps even a beggar—no one knows, and probably no one cares, for ill conduct has hardened against him hearts that once loved him, unless his mother lives, and then there is *one* heart still breaking for him.”

Mr. Oakley stopped, for he thought of a mother then who had never had cause to weep for her son, but who was long since gone to the land of gladness.

They reached the rectory, but Mr. Hastings could not be induced to stay to dinner, not even if they drove down to fetch his daughter.

“No,” he said; “he could not help his friends in their discussion in the evening; and it was a painful subject to him;” so Lucy drove him home.

No one knew the history of Janet Hastings’ early trials, excepting Marion, to whom she had confessed them as a warning for her guidance. Alas! a neglected warning, as they generally are; and, therefore, Mr. Oakley and his daughter did not understand the expression of deep pain visible in the usually tranquil face of Mr. Hastings; but they respected it, and made no remarks.

Dr. Mortimer arrived in time for dinner. He had ridden off his agitation, and had almost his own cheerful manner again; and the party sat down in good spirits to their pleasant meal.

“This is my first teetotal dinner,” remarked the doctor to Mrs. Oakley. “It was well that I had not to eat it alone.”

“You ought not to be alone, Dr. Mortimer,” she replied; “it is a shame for you, with a good income

and nice house, to poke away there all alone: why don't you get married, like a sensible man?"

The doctor laughed.

"Well, I believe it is a shame; but then, you see, I do not know where to find the wife 'just suited to my mind.' I am afraid little Lucy won't have me; and now, you see, I must have one who will agree with me about wine, and beer, and so on: so that my difficulties are increased by my new method."

"You never asked Lucy, yet, did you, doctor?" asked Agnes, mischievously.

"I ask her now?" was his reply, turning to the laughing Lucy, who was seated beside him. "I make her an offer of my hand and heart—my house and income, and a big cut-glass jug of cold water?"

"The last is tempting!" cried Lucy; "but, really, I do wish, with mamma, that you would find a suitable wife."

"And who so suitable as Lucy Oakley? Is it not like sitting in the sunshine to be near her—to see her happy face, and hear her laugh?"

"Come, come, doctor, that is too much, you know; mamma was serious, and you are joking."

"Upon my honour, I am not."

"Then, upon *my* honour, you ought to be, doctor, dear," said Lucy. "Why, you know, it is not right to be rude, but I really think your wife ought to be a little older than the child you have so often carried up the hill on your horse, or round the orchard on your shoulder."

"Then will you find me a wife?"

"It is a dangerous amusement, match-making," said Mrs. Oakley; "so we had better leave you to choose one yourself. Yet, there is Janet Hastings, if you could prevail upon her, now, you would indeed be a happy man."

He shook his head.

"I admire Miss Hastings extremely—if I were a woman, I should say I love her; but there is something about her, which always seems to say that her

estate is never to be changed. Some early disappointment has, I am convinced, told strongly and lastingly upon her, so I do not like to make up to her, and be refused."

"Then we must leave you to make your own choice, as you cannot have Lucy, and you will not try Janet," said Mrs. Oakley; "and, I am sure, whoever you may choose, will be welcome to us all."

"Thank you, kind friend; but now, just now, I feel so full of my new ideas upon the subject of temperance, that I have no time to think of a wife. I want to devise some means of furthering the good cause here, in our own neighbourhood."

"A great change will take place, I think," said the rector, "when your patients find that you refuse to allow them wine, by way of strengthening them; it will bring the whole subject more prominently forward."

"Ah!" said the doctor; "and I am afraid that some of them will find out that I am not the clever fellow they took me for; and that smart young man, with the pink cheeks and blue spectacles, who has just set up in Longdown, will get away some of my best patients."

"Then you will be a martyr!" exclaimed Lucy; "and in an excellent cause. But will people really give you up, do you think?"

"Not unlikely. Think of the grandees at the castle, what would they say to a temperance doctor? And many others are so apt to follow the example of their richer neighbours, that I should not be surprised if, by next Christmas, my incomings were much diminished."

"Does that shake your determination?" inquired Mr. Oakley, well knowing with whom he was talking, and that Dr. Mortimer was a man who would never yield an inch, where he saw his duty clearly.

"Not a bit of it," replied the doctor; "I foresee it, and shall shape my expenditure accordingly. In

fact, I shall not look out for this fair wife of mine, till I see how the land lies."

"And if she is worth anything," cried Lucy, "she will care all the more for you on account of that very thing."

"She shall be as like you, Lucy, as I can possibly find," was his answer; "and if she is half as good, I shall be a happy man."

Our merry Lucy looked a little confused; and her mother changed the subject adroitly, by inquiring of the doctor concerning some of his patients; and in pleasant and useful converse the evening was spent, till Dr. Mortimer took his leave.

CHAPTER XVIII.

DR. MORTIMER was not a man to forget a cause in which he was interested.

The result of his adhesion to the temperance cause soon became known among his patients, and he had, as he anticipated, to meet with much opposition.

Those who had hitherto drunk wine or beer in accordance with his recommendation, were by no means pleased at being told that he had discovered that they could regain their strength as well or better without stimulants. They taxed the doctor with inconsistency, and he boldly met the charge.

"If to change one's principles is to be inconsistent, undoubtedly I am so, for my principles on this subject are completely changed. If when one has all one's life been in error, and on discovering it to be an error one abandons it, be to act inconsistently, I plead guilty to the charge. But you might as well reproach a drunkard with inconsistency when he becomes a sober man, or a thief when he grows honest, and tell them that they ought

not to desert their original ways, lest they be charged with inconsistency."

But no effect could he produce on the majority of his patients.

So the worthy doctor was fain to try his influence over those whom he had never led into the bad habit, and to this end he began a crusade against all the beershops and public-houses in the parish.

Now Holmdale parish contained about twelve hundred inhabitants. Nearly seven hundred of these were clustered around the church, and formed the village; three hundred were in a hamlet "over the hill," to which, in consequence of its relative position, the name of Overhill had been given; and the remaining two hundred were scattered about in the neighbourhood of the farmhouses where the labouring men had employment.

Dr. Mortimer rode about taking note of the number of places where intoxicating drinks were sold in the parish, and the result of his inquiries was startling.

In the village itself there were two thriving public-houses and three beershops: in Overhill were two beershops, and two more of a lower description, but still driving a profitable trade, were as near to the greater portion of the scattered two hundred as circumstances would admit.

The doctor had never before given attention to the subject; but now the proportion of houses for the encouragement of drunkenness to the population of the parish struck him with astonishment. At the same time he observed that three bakers, and a village shop at Overhill which sold bread among its various wares, were sufficient to satisfy the wants of the population, and that the butchers and grocers were in the same proportion, although of course the butchers, and generally the bakers also, had to supply not only the villagers but the gentry of the neighbourhood.

"How great a proportion of the wages of the

people goes to support these drinking places which might be so well bestowed in wholesome food or clothing for their families!" said the doctor to himself as he rode home after making his notes of these things.

Near his own door he met a country gentleman whose family had for many years been his patients. Mr. Heathcote was a good-natured man, one who loved his horses, and knew his way "across country" better than Dr. Mortimer himself; and as every hunting man *must* drink, he was fond of good cheer, as it is called. Yet with a naturally strong constitution, and no instinctive bias towards excess, it was very seldom indeed that you could have said Squire Heathcote was intoxicated, though he certainly did generally seem more lively after dinner than in the earlier part of the day.

Meeting him thus, while his own mind was full of the subject, Dr. Mortimer opened at once upon it, and told the object for which he had that day been riding as he expressed it "all over the parish."

The squire held up the butt-end of his whip to his eye as if it had contained a spy-glass, and, looking at the other with a queer expression of surprise, he said,—

"Why, my good fellow, you are not going to join those mad, teetotalers! They tell me our good parson and all his family are crazy about it; but if our doctor is to go mad, what on earth is to become of us?"

Dr. Mortimer laughed heartily at the tone of consternation in which this speech was uttered, and then said,—

"My dear sir, it is most true, yet I hope I shall not be the less able to attend to all your ailments when my head is clear from the effect of wine or other strong drinks."

The squire stared with still more amazement.

"Why, doctor, bless my soul, you don't mean to say you ever get tipsy?"

"No, no, I hope not," returned the doctor, "but still as wine never gave me medical knowledge, probably the absence of wine will not take it away."

"Possibly not," said the squire, whose manner, however, showed that he thought this rather a doubtful question; "but now tell me, my dear fellow, what on earth has put such nonsense into your head?"

"What nonsense?"

"Why, the nonsense of thinking that, because some poor wretches get drunk and beat their wives and ruin their families, therefore you, a sober respectable gentleman, are to leave off your glass, of which you never take a drop more than is good for you."

"Whew! good for me is more perhaps than I can allow; but still, Mr. Heathcote, can you tell me how I am to persuade the poor labouring man to be sober unless I can tell him that I never myself take intoxicating drinks?"

"I don't see the good of it," said the squire, first whistling and then looking, as he thought, very wise; "I don't see why you are to be punished because other folk get drunk."

"No," returned the doctor; "but if it be no punishment, but a course which, being undertaken from a sense of duty, becomes a pleasure, and if by so doing I am enabled to say to the drunkard that I press upon him no course which I myself shrink from adopting, but that, while I ask him to forego his beer or spirits, I forego my wine, surely I have a better chance with him than you would have, for instance?"

"I? Ah! it will be some time before you bring me round to your doctrines: but my plan is to let the people alone."

"An easy plan, if one has no conscience," replied Dr. Mortimer; "if one is content to enjoy the blessings God has placed in our path, and care nothing for the miseries of others."

The good-natured squire looked a little disconcerted—for he certainly lived for himself, and enjoyed

life amazingly, and all his thought of others was expended in carelessly giving a sovereign, if ever his clergyman, or any other philanthropist, asked him for it; but he was not going to be offended; he never took offence unless it was intended he should—he was too much of a gentleman for that; so, shaking hands heartily with the doctor, he loosened the bridle of his thorough-bred horse, and was out of sight in a few moments.

Dr. Mortimer looked after him.

“Was it for such a life as that that men are given wealth and positions of influence?” he murmured to himself; but then, immediately checking himself, he added, “Stop a minute, Mister Doctor, and think how many years *you* have lived a careless selfish life, working hard for an income, and very careful of the bodies of your fellow creatures, but with little thought for their improvement, either moral or religious.”

And with this wholesome commentary on the words, “Who maketh thee to differ from another?” he took his horse to the stable, and entered his home.

Dr. Mortimer was not to be called a strictly religious man, but he was a man of high moral worth; and his intimacy with his excellent pastor and his family, as well as with Mr. Hastings and his daughter, and, till her death, his many chats with good pious old Mrs. Douglas, had so affected his character that he had much of the *leaven* of true Christianity in him; and as he was a firm believer in all the doctrines of the Bible, he wanted but little to become as deeply religious as any of them. Perhaps that little may be brought about—as it so often is on soils so ready—by the good seed of affliction; or maybe it will gradually dawn in the course of his newly begun efforts for the good of his fellow-creatures.

His statistics arranged, his plan of operations was determined on. When he had dined he walked

straight to the bar of the "Anchor" public-house. Joe Cardwell stared at him, and asked what he would have.

"Nothing, thank you, Mr. Cardwell, but if you will kindly allow me to sit here a little while, I will willingly pay for something," and he laid a shilling on the counter. The landlord took it up with a bow.

"Here, Jones! Wilson! Dr. Mortimer is going to stand treat to some of you!"

"No, no!" cried the doctor, eagerly; "that shilling is for you, because I do *not* drink, and is not intended for those who do. No 'standing treat' with me, I assure you!"

"As you please, sir," returned Joe, slipping the shilling into his pocket; "pray rest as long as you like, sir."

There was no rest for our doctor there. He sat, pencil in hand, noting down the customers, all of whom he knew by name, and the quantity of drink which they had or paid for while he was there.

"I say, Bill! what on earth is that 'ere doctor doing?" whispered a seedy half-drunken fellow to his mate.

"Making a picture of us all, I suspect!" returns Bill, in the same tone, and at the moment setting his cap in a jaunty way on one side of his head, in order that *his* portrait, at least, might look "spicy." "I've heard they make all sorts of rum pictures now-a-days, and get no end of money for 'em."

"But I didn't know the doctor could make pictures," said the other.

Bill looked wise. "There's no knowing what a man can do, Jack; and our doctor be mortal clever: that's what I do know!"

"I wish he wouldn't sit there so glum all this time, though," muttered Jack; "I don't a bit believe he's drawing."

But others came in, and though the presence of the doctor, sitting so gravely in the corner, kept them quieter than usual, yet, after a few more glasses of

spirits had been added to the beer, for which the majority had ostensibly entered the bar, they began to laugh and talk, without giving him much heed.

At length, with a list, terribly long, of the names of these working-men—and, in many instances, of the sum they had already expended in drink that evening—Dr. Mortimer left the “Anchor,” with a kind, but grave nod to the jolly landlord; who, far too old a hand to let *himself* get drunk, had grown fat and rich upon the sins of his neighbours.

But Dr. Mortimer’s work was not done for that evening, though it was past nine o’clock. He walked quickly down the straggling sort of street, and stopped near the baker’s shop, whose one light burnt dimly, showing a goodly array of loaves of all sizes.

Outside this shop more than a dozen women were collected, and Dr. Mortimer addressed one whose husband he had left just before at the “Anchor.”

“Why are you out so late to-night, Mrs. Wilks?” he asked, in a kindly tone.

The woman courtesied, and replied,—

“I am waiting for my husband, sir; the poor children have had not a bit of bread since the morning, and Mr. Williams says he can’t afford to trust me any more till James brings the money to pay him.”

“And how soon do you think he will come?”

“Ah, sir! who knows? He has to go to the ‘Anchor’ to be paid, and then he must drink a little, you see, sir, for the good of the house; and it’s difficult for a man to drink only a little, you know, sir; and so I don’t know when he will come.”

“Had you not better put the children to bed, Sarah?” said another woman; “and then they’ll go to sleep, and not be crying for bread; and if James comes I’ll tell him what you want.”

“It’s hard for the poor things to starve, when their father gets fifteen shillings a week!” returned the other; “and if I don’t catch Jem now, I shall have to come buying on Sunday morning; and I don’t like

to break the Sabbath if I can help it, you know, Jane!"

"We shall all have to do the same, if the men won't come out of that horrid 'Anchor!'" said Jane; "I'll go and try to get mine out, that I will!" and she set off towards the house where her husband was drinking away her life, and that of her children, as well as his own.

Dr. Mortimer went on. A similar scene was being enacted outside the butcher's shop, and at the grocer's, who was also a purveyor of clothing of all sorts; and mothers who wanted a pair of shoes for a child (poor things, they do not think of themselves in these cases) were waiting for the approach of their husbands.

Dr. Mortimer had to pass the baker's door again on his return. Mrs. Wilks and several other women were still standing there.

"Mrs. Wilks," said the doctor, "could you not persuade your husband, some day when he is sober, to leave off drink *altogether*? Then he would have no temptation to get too much, you know."

"Why, no, sir," she replied, "I don't know as I could; for you see, sir, Jem's not a strong man, and he couldn't very well work hard if he had not a little beer just to keep him up."

"Don't you think getting drunk does him harm?"

"Yes, sure, sir, but then most times he only gets drunk on a Saturday evening and——"

"And all Sunday," said Dr. Mortimer, finishing her sentence for her.

She looked sorrowful; then answered, "Yes," in a low voice.

"Well, then, if for two days in a week he is drunk, do you not think he is doing serious harm to his constitution, which you say yourself is not a very strong one?"

"Indeed, sir, and I am afraid he is," was the reply.

"Well, then, if he were sober on those two days, and if, instead of drinking, he gave you money enough to buy a nice piece of meat for dinner, would not the meat give him more strength than the drink?"

"Maybe so, sir, but you see he has got the habit of it, and it is hard to leave off what one is accustomed to. You would find it so yourself, sir."

The doctor smiled.

"What should you say if I told you that I had all on a sudden left off the wine I used to take with my dinner, and that I now never touch a drop of anything of the sort?"

"Why, sir, I should think you would not do that. You take a good deal of exercise, sir, and must want support."

"I do want support," he replied, "and I get it in meat and bread and potatoes, and such like wholesome food. It is quite true that I have left off all that you think so supporting, and, God helping me, I never intend to take any of them again."

The other women had gathered round the doctor and Mrs. Wilks, and their exclamations of astonishment were many, if not various. At last one of them ventured to say,—

"May I make so bold, sir, as to ask why you have done this? For you are such a good gentleman that I am sure you never get tipsy, so I don't see why you should leave off your wine."

"I will tell you then, Mrs. Stokes. I have left it off in order that you all and your husbands should know that I do not ask them to do what I will not do myself, when I entreat them to shun the drink as they would poison."

Again the murmurs of astonishment passed among the women.

"Well, sir, we all know you are a good gentleman," said Mrs. Stokes, "and if you could persuade the men to give it up it would be better for us all."

At this moment the woman we have called Jane returned from her visit to the "Anchor." Tears were pouring down her cheeks, as if she were incapable of the effort either to check or conceal them.

"Well, Jane?" said one of the party.

"There he is, noisy drunk, and I could not get a penny out of him; and your husband too, and yours," turning to some of the others. "They all swore at me, and told me to go home, and home I must go, for there is no use staying here: they'll sit there till they are turned out like brute beasts. Oh, dear! Oh, dear!" And she set off towards her poverty-stricken home.

"It's no use waiting; we must all go home, I'm afraid," said Mrs. Stokes; and slowly and sadly the poor wives turned away, each in the direction of her cottage. They courtesied to the doctor, and he bade them all good night in a hearty manner; then murmured to himself,—

"I might have given them bread, but that would only encourage their husbands to drink more; so they would be worse off, poor things, than they are now. It is too late to go to the rectory, so I must go home. Really, I think Mrs. Oakley is right: I *do* want a wife to talk to, who would sympathize with all my feelings. I wish little Lucy had been ten years older—but there's no use in wishing!"

So the good doctor returned to his home.

CHAPTER XIX.

HAPPY were the Oakley family one morning when a letter arrived from their beloved friend Marion, to announce that she was about, with her husband, to accept their oft repeated invitation to spend a short time at the rectory. She did not tell them that anxiety on Gilbert's account had brought her own

health very low, neither did they know that, alarmed at her increasing illness, her husband had at length promised her to abstain entirely from the drink he loved, and that hope and happiness were beginning to dawn upon her again. But she could not resist the one little word at the end of her letter, "My precious husband is now a teetotaler like your dear selves;" and that was enough for them. They had never heard how Gilbert had lately lived.

The first few days of the intended visit had been claimed by the widow of Captain Archer, and they felt that it was but right to visit her in her loneliness, but after that Marion promised to be all their own.

Mr. Oakley and Agnes met them at the station ready to convey them to the Hall; and while the pleasure and excitement of returning to what she still fondly called "home" had brought back the colour to Marion's check, her eyes showed forth their happiness as she recognized Agnes among the waiters on the platform, and therefore it was no marvel that Agnes should soon have exclaimed, "How well you are looking, darling Marion!" and that Marion's answering smile should have no trace of sorrow in it.

During the drive to the Hall, Agnes was obliged to forewarn her friend of the great change which she would observe in Mrs. Archer; but when that was done their conversation was all on happy subjects till they entered the gate which led to the house. How changed all there appeared! The smooth gravel walks covered with weeds; the edges of the turf rough and ragged; the creepers against the house, which had been wont to hang so beautifully in their right places, peeping in at the windows just to show their beauty, but not obtruding themselves, now hung neglected from the walls, half covering some of the windows, whose closed shutters looked as if they had not been opened for months.

Our party observed all these signs of neglect with deep regret; and Gilbert said,—

"Thomas is to blame here. It could not be ex-

pected that Mrs. Archer should attend to such things; but there has been shameful neglect somewhere."

"It seems to be high time that you were here to put matters to rights," said Mr. Oakley; "the servants all look to you as the representative of their master."

"I wish my poor cousin had left the place in trust for Ronald," said Gilbert; "you would then have had power to insist on its being kept in order; but now, if she chooses to allow her servants to be negligent, there is no one to interfere while I am away."

There was no time for further parley; the hall door was opened by a slovenly-looking girl, and with many expressions of gratitude to their kind friends, Gilbert and his wife took leave of them, and entered the house.

"How is your mistress to-day?" inquired Gilbert of the girl, as they followed her into the drawing-room.

"She be coming down directly," was the only answer, as the girl began to open the shutters, which were closely barred; and having done this, without any further notice of the visitors, she left the room.

Gilbert and Marion looked at each other: a feeling of oppression kept them silent. To find this once cheerful house so dull and desolate, and to know, as both of them did, that this was all the consequence of indulgence in drink, kept Gilbert silent from shame, and Marion from sorrow.

Gilbert opened one of the windows, which looked out upon the lawn: it was stiff, as if seldom opened; and the apartment had that close and stuffy smell you may always find in a neglected and forsaken room.

After nearly half an hour, Mrs. Archer entered; and notwithstanding that she had been told what to expect, Marion felt inexpressibly shocked.

The upright form and sprightly manner were gone,

and Mrs. Archer stooped as if with age: the clear complexion, which had formed her principal beauty, had left only a dull, dirty, pasty look, except in the region of the nose and eyelids, where a heavy bluish red told its own terrible tale; and the eyes, which used to look out so brightly and intelligently, now sunken and dim, seemed to have scarcely any speculation in them.

The dirty widow's cap and rusty weeds she wore, added not a little to the painfulness of the picture.

She met her guests, however, with kindness, thanked them for coming, hoped they would stay a long while, and apologized for the untidy appearance of the room by saying she never sat there, and that the servants never would keep things in order without her eye being constantly on them; and that, in her delicate health, was impossible.

"I hope, now you are here, Gilbert, you will kindly see to things a little for me," she added at last; and after a short conversation, she rang the bell, in order that Marion should be shown to her room.

The "best spare room" had all that air of discomfort which such a room always has where the mistress of the house takes no interest in its appearance. The chairs all stood against the wall, as if they were fixtures; the window shutters were closed when Marion entered, and the maid, hurriedly opening them, threw light upon the dust which had accumulated upon all the furniture.

Marion threw up the sash of one window, which looked out upon the once pretty flower-garden, in a corner of which she recognized the portion especially belonging to poor Ronald, where he and his baby cousins had spent such happy hours. Tall luxuriant weeds overtopped the flowers.

Marion sighed as she gazed; and Gilbert, coming in at that moment, said,—

"You may well sigh, my pretty wife, for everything does look the perfection of desolation: I shall be

glad to get you away to some of your cheerful friends, for you will mope to death in such a place as this."

She looked up lovingly in his face, for he had put his arm round her as he spoke.

"I can never mope when you are with me," she said, softly.

"How pretty it is to hear such things said to one! and the odd part of the matter is, that I am fool enough to believe it," he replied.

Marion laughed, for she was recovering her spirits again; and then, with the assistance of her husband, she opened their packages, and began to arrange the room in a more habitable manner.

"I wonder what is become of Haytor, Mrs. Archer's favourite maid, who used to act as house-keeper? She must have left her, or she would surely have made her appearance, instead of that untidy girl!"

"We shall know in due time, I suppose. Meanwhile, my darling, if I have done all I can for you, I will leave you to change your travelling dress, and just go round the garden, and see what men are at work, and what has become of the whole place. I half expect to find nettles growing in the kitchen."

It was not a long business with Marion, the changing her dress; and she had arranged her hair, and put on a simple evening gown, before her husband had finished his tour of inspection. And then a gloom she could not shake off came upon her. She sat for a while at the open window, and gathered a cluster of roses which hung invitingly, though wildly, over it; these she arranged in a vase on the mantelpiece, and set it on the comfortless looking table, in the centre of the room, where neither writing materials nor books were placed, to say, "Make yourself at home."

In her heart, she could not help endorsing Gilbert's wish that the time to end this first visit had arrived; but she resolved, happen what might, that if business

kept her husband at the Hall, she would stay with him.

The dinner was a dull affair. Poor Mrs. Archer had never thought of inviting any one to meet her young connections, and she was herself in a state so low and desponding, that it was difficult indeed to keep up a show of conversation during the dinner.

Wine was on the table, and Mrs. Archer did for a moment waken into something like animation on hearing Gilbert decline to take it, and she exclaimed,—

“Why, surely, Gilbert, you, of all people, are not such a fool as to turn into a teetotaler?”

He laughed, but it was an uncomfortable laugh, as he replied,—

“Well, Mrs. Archer, I must almost confess that I am; at any rate, I have left off wine for the present.”

“Then you drink something else?” persisted the lady; “and so, I hope, does Marion: she, at least, can never keep up her strength without something?”

“Indeed,” answered Marion, to whom Mrs. Archer had turned, “I never drink anything but water at dinner; and I am sure that wine would make me ill!”

“But it is so *unsociable* not to drink wine.”

“We must ask you to forgive us, then, dear madam; but really we neither of us drink it now.”

Their hostess poured out a liquid into her own glass from a small decanter which stood beside her, as she said,—

“Think of your leaving me all by myself in this way! You must excuse me for taking a little stimulant, for really I am so weak, my nerves are so terribly shaken, that I could not live if I did not keep myself up.”

As the dinner drew to a close, Mrs. Archer became more talkative. She abused her neighbours, who, she

said, never came near her; and her servants, who were all careless and neglectful; and Dr. Mortimer, who, she declared, was fool enough, whenever he came near her, to try to persuade her to drink water; and after she had talked for some time, she began to cry, and bemoan the loss of her husband and children, and declare there was nobody on earth so miserable as herself.

Marion and Gilbert looked at one another in dismay. What was to be done? It appeared as if they were to sit there for ever; and yet the longer they remained the more of the clear white of that cruel decanter was to be seen, and the more maudlin grew its unhappy victim. At length, after signing to her husband for permission to do so, Marion ventured to rise and propose that they should retire to the drawing-room.

"Oh, yes—certainly! I forgot you might be tired. I never sit in the drawing-room, myself," said Mrs. Archer; "I generally stay here till bed-time; the poor captain liked this room best!"

She rose as she spoke, and tottered towards the door. Gilbert offered her his arm; she stopped: "Won't you finish your wine? Oh, I forgot! How curious! Well, come, then! Ha! ha! only think of my having teetotalers in my house!" and with such silly chatter she, with Gilbert's assistance, made her way across the hall.

Marion followed, her heart ready to break.

"And yet," she thought, "perhaps this woeful sight may be of use to my darling Gilbert; it may show him what drinking makes of us! So I must bear to witness it, for his sake!"

Tea was brought; but Mrs. Archer would not touch it—it was not good for her nerves, she said—so Marion and Gilbert had it to themselves. Right glad were they when the clock over the stable, the only thing about the house that did not seem out of order, struck an hour which they could decently claim as their time for retiring; and glad, also, was

Mrs. Archer, for all these last two hours she had been longing for just a drop more to cheer her spirits, and somehow she dared not take it in presence of her guests.

CHAPTER XX.

PLEASANT time passes all too quickly. After a day spent at the Hall, Gilbert Archer declared his Marion should no longer endure the painful sight of Mrs. Archer's changed condition; and he brought her down to the rectory, promising that though his presence was still wanted in overlooking the repairs for his cousin, he would only go to the Hall after breakfast, and would always return in time for dinner at the Oakleys'.

What happy days they were! Drives all over the village and neighbourhood to see old friends, and always with one or other dear friend by her side; visits to the poor, who all remembered with love the gentle grandchild of their good old friend and helper; and sweet evenings all together, when Janet Hastings always made one of the party—why did they pass so soon? And Marion had the comfort of seeing that the out-of-door life her husband was leading, combined with strict water-drinking, was helping to restore his looks from the unhealthy air they had lately acquired; so the effect of the great shade that had lately darkened her heart was in great measure gone. But, all too soon, the last day was come; and Marion felt it painfully. It had been arranged that Lucy should drive her over to pay a farewell visit to Mrs. Archer, and perhaps bring back her husband. But though the morning had been fine and sunny, at noon the sky became overcast, a few rolls of distant thunder were heard, and then down came the pouring rain, steadily and heavily, as if it never meant to cease falling; and it

was soon apparent that no drive could be taken that day.

"I ought not to complain," said Marion, when this fact was decided on, "for we have had most beautiful weather since we have been here: this is the first really rainy day in our whole fortnight. And it has been a very happy time, my Lucy!"

Lucy was sitting on her favourite low seat, her mother's footstool, and as Mrs. Oakley was not in the room, Marion occupied the mother's chair. Lucy took her hand lovingly, and said,—

"I only wish it were the beginning, instead of the end, of the fortnight; I cannot bear to have you go! But you will come to us again next summer, if not before—perhaps at Christmas, and bring us something more to love."

Marion stooped and kissed her, while she said,—

"I hope so, darling; but——"

"Hush, my own Marion!" interrupted Agnes; "remember, you must not think of evil. 'Hope on, hope ever,' is a good motto."

Marion smiled.

"It is a good and a beautiful one; so I won't say a tearful word, nor think of pain on this, our last happy day together!"

"I have bad news for our poor parish," said the rector, when he came in to luncheon. "Only think! The 'Lion' public-house has been purchased by Sir Reginald Firewater, the distiller; he is going to turn out the present landlord—who will probably set up an opposition, in the form of a beershop, as near to the 'Lion' as he can—and the old house is to have a new front, and be made more like a London gin-palace than anything else, just to attract the poor people by its outward beauty; and a butler, who has grown rich in Sir Reginald's service, is to be its landlord. The workmen are busy at it to-day!"

The whole party were dismayed; and many were their expressions of regret and anxiety.

"I feared, from the first moment of his entering

the Castle, that Sir Reginald Firewater would sorely trouble us in the parish," said Mrs. Oakley, at last ; "but we must take all the more pains to spread better principles among our people. I am certain that nothing but total abstinence can save the majority of them !"

"It will be a hard fight : for Sir Reginald is so rich that many of the people will be employed by him, and will be fearful of offending him," said the rector, mournfully.

"And so they are to ruin themselves, soul and body, to please their employer !" exclaimed Lucy. "I should like to go and tear down the fine front he is putting to the 'Lion !'"

Her father could not but be amused at her vehemence.

"I fear we cannot do that," he said ; "it is by moral force alone that we can attack the enemy. Happily, we muster strong ; and now that Mortimer has joined us we present no mean front to the foe !"

"Dear Dr. Mortimer is worth a dozen ordinary men !" cried Lucy, warmly.

"Are you beginning to change your mind, Lucy ?" asked Frederick, smiling.

"No, no, Master Fred ! but I do love Dr. Mortimer's straightforward honest ways—do not you, dear mamma ?"

"I do, indeed, love and honour him," replied her mother ; "and, like everybody else who is going in the right direction, he grows better every day of his life !"

"How many people must be going in the wrong direction !" said Frederick ; "for the majority never seem to get any better—often worse—the longer one knows them."

All this time the rain continued to fall, and ere the party dispersed after luncheon it was arranged that Frederick should drive down to fetch Mr. Hastings and Janet whenever a lull should take place. No one else was to venture out of doors.

Marion thought of her husband, and regretted his exposure to the weather. She was rather surprised that he had not come home, when the rain had shown so decided an intention of continuing, but she did not like to distress her loved friends by making them partakers of her anxiety.

In truth, Gilbert Archer had thought of returning to the rectory before the hour of luncheon. During the time of his visit he had effected wonders in setting the outward appearance of the Hall to rights. The weeds were cleared away, the bushes cut within reasonable bounds, the lawns twice mown, and the creepers trained under his own superintendence. The stables were opened and aired, and rusty locks set in order; yet on this rainy day, though all the out-of-door work was nearly completed, Gilbert felt that he must not leave the place without saying farewell to its mistress, and it was always late before she was to be seen. He waited, therefore, in the dining-room, hoping she would come to luncheon; but no: she sent him word that she was more than usually unwell, but hoped he would make himself comfortable, and she would see him in a couple of hours' time.

Having been for some time out in the pouring rain, Gilbert was nearly wet through, and no gentle Marion was there to change his damp coat, and wipe his hat; so, after he had eaten a little, he betook himself to the kitchen. There standing before the fire, he got dry as well as he could, and then rambled listlessly through the forsaken rooms. Five o'clock struck—in another hour he ought to be seated at the rectory dinner-table.

Not very long afterwards, Mrs. Archer entered the room. She apologized for having detained her cousin so long, but in a tone which showed she did not regard it as having caused him any inconvenience. But she declared that he must really indulge her this once with his company at dinner. She had

been very good, she said, in letting him leave her every day; but as this was the last, stay he must. It was impossible that he could walk to the rectory just now, for the rain was falling more heavily than ever. He pleaded his engagement with Mrs. Oakley to dine with her. But all was in vain: Mrs. Archer would hear of no refusal; and she at last began to whimper and say Gilbert had quite forgotten her "poor dear captain"; so to pacify her, he at length agreed to remain for dinner if she would let him go immediately afterwards. So they sat down together.

The wine as usual was on the table. Gilbert felt low-spirited and chilly. The tempter saw his advantage: this was a weak moment. Mrs. Archer pressed him to take just a little wine, assured him that he would "catch his death of cold" after having been out in the rain so long if he did not "take something to warm him"; and her arguments tallying exactly with his own feelings, he was at length prevailed upon to pour out a glass of wine. It was excellent wine: almost unconsciously, as it seemed, Gilbert took another and another glass, at which Mrs. Archer expressed her unqualified delight.

Dessert was brought, the biscuits which create the most pleasant thirst placed upon the table, and at length Mrs. Archer ventured to order her own little kettle over a lamp, which contained boiling water to mix with her favourite spirits. Will Gilbert touch that? Will he not be satisfied with the wine he has already drunk? Will he not remember the loving wife whose heart he is on the point of breaking? Alas! "I will seek it yet again," is the inspiration that comes from strong drink. It would be so unkind to poor Mrs. Archer to refuse to share what she thought so good, and for this once it could do no harm!

She was delighted to mix it for him as well as her trembling hands could do it. Her kettle, light as it was, she could not hold, but Gilbert poured out the

boiling water, and mixed it himself with the liquid fire; and he laughed with pleasure, as though he had found a long-lost joy again.

And how fared it meanwhile with his devoted wife? It had been a weary day. The prospect of parting with friends so truly loved would have been painful at any time, but the state of the weather was such as would have affected stronger nerves than Marion's had become.

There could be no last look at her grandmother's grave, no walk to see once more the cottage where her girlhood had been passed so happily, no garden to walk in once more: for the rain came pouring down unceasingly. Marion, always accompanied by Agnes and Lucy, busied herself in packing up her box and her husband's portmanteau; but she was quick in all such doings, and they lasted but a short time.

And as hour after hour passed, and still no Gilbert came, an undefined feeling of dread came over her. She felt sure he could not be standing about in the garden through all this heavy rain, and she almost blamed herself for not having remained with him at the Hall. But when once she uttered this self-reproach aloud, both Agnes and Lucy declared, that nothing would have induced them to let her remain in that dull place all through her holiday.

Janet, however, looked at her, and the dreadful truth struck on the heart of that faithful friend that her Marion now knew by terrible experience that from which her warning voice had striven in vain to save her.

Marion felt all that was expressed in the hasty look Janet had cast upon her. Oh, how she longed to throw herself into her arms, and weep out all her sorrow—to tell of those terrible days now past, and her fears for the future! But she dared not expose the husband she loved so well; and, to change altogether to another subject, she sat down to the piano.

But it was to a sad air alone that her fingers could adapt themselves ; and almost unconsciously she sang those touching words,—

“I’m wearin’ awa, Jean,
Like snaw-wreaths in thaw, Jean ;
I’m wearin’ awa to the land o’ the leal.
There’s nae sorrow there, Jean,
There’s neither could nor care, Jean,
The day’s aye fair in the land o’ the leal.”

Her friends gathered round her anxiously, the sweet voice seemed so sadly agreeing with the words of her song ; till at last Lucy said,—

“Now, you must not sing that any more, our own Marion : it is too melancholy for to-day—our last day together. Come, let us sing this : it will suit us all better, and cheers one in this work-a-day world.” And Marion yielding, Lucy began, the others joining in singing :—

“There is a land of pure delight
Where saints immortal reign ;”

and they sang on till every heart felt soothed.

Soon afterwards Frederick came in with Mr. Hastings, and kind Mrs. Oakley herself joined the party, and they talked of the parish, and the poor and their troubles, and their own efforts for the good of those around them, till the dressing bell rang.

Then again, as the girls walked upstairs with Marion, they were distressed to see the anxious look she gave out of the window on the staircase which looked out over the garden towards the churchyard gate.

“It is raining so, darling, you must not expect him yet,” said Agnes, softly, “Mrs. Archer must surely keep him to dine with her, and she will take good care of him.”

“Oh, he will not dine there !” exclaimed Marion ; then checking herself, she added, “He will hardly be away from us this last evening, when he knows, too,

that Mr. Hastings has come on purpose to meet him."

"He will come as soon as the rain ceases, probably," said Agnes, encouragingly; "it must clear up soon, I think. See, there is a break in the clouds over the yew-trees; he will come soon, and he little knows how unhappy his dear little wife is without him. Why, we shall be quite jealous if you look so sad, dear Marion!"

Marion kissed her, saying,—

"You must forgive me, dear one, and I will try to be gay."

Agnes lingered yet in Marion's room till her sister called to her to make haste with her own dressing; but no sooner had the door closed after her, than Marion sank suddenly on a chair and pressed her hand tightly over her heart.

"I must not give way—I must seem happy; but oh, what is he doing?"

She dared not even pour out her heart to Him who is always ready to hear our sorrows, for she knew the tears would come while thus seeking comfort, and her kind friends would detect their traces. So she resolutely set herself again to her simple toilette, and was ready with a quiet, patient, yet most loving smile when the girls again came to her door to take her down to dinner.

Dr. Mortimer had just come in to dine and say farewell. His lively conversation was a great help to his friends, and, though the gentlemen had the greater part of the talk to themselves, yet they kept it up well, and no trace of dulness was perceptible during the dinner.

But soon the doctor was gone. The tea-urn was being brought into the room, the rain ceased to fall, yet still Gilbert came not.

Frederick Oakley, perceiving the looks of Marion, instantly turned towards the garden, and volunteered to go and fetch Gilbert home. It was treating them all very ill, he declared, thus to absent himself; and

poor Marion felt and looked grateful to him for going.

Not so Gilbert Archer. He had stayed with his wretched temptress, enjoying, as no sober person can imagine how a drunkard enjoys, the intoxicating cup, till at length the darkening evening warned him that he had stayed too long. He rose to go: pressed the hand of Mrs. Archer with one almost as unsteady as her own, and set out on his walk towards the village.

The cool night air brought some degree of relief to his heated brain, and he began with some dismay to contemplate the meeting with his wife. He knew full well that she would discover the truth, however he might attempt to conceal it; yet every attempt must be made.

He took a cigar and lighted it—for you will seldom find a man fond of drink who is not also a slave to tobacco—and he imagined the smell of the poisonous weed might stifle that of the spirits he had taken.

It was not therefore with feelings of gratification that, just after he had lighted the cigar, Gilbert perceived Frederick Oakley coming towards him.

Frederick on his part was startled. He could not but observe the altered gait of the man he had always hitherto seen perfectly sober, and a shudder ran through his frame; yet it was not for him to appear to notice anything wrong in one who was his father's guest: he therefore met him politely, and told him that his wife had appeared so anxious for his return, that he had ventured to set out in search of him.

Gilbert's reply was rather unintelligible, but he offered a cigar to his companion. This was civilly declined.

"I never smoke," said Frederick.

"Why not?" asked Gilbert.

"I think it quite as pernicious as drinking," replied Frederick, "and in one respect almost worse, because its evil effects are less quickly perceived, and therefore many are led to smoke who would have a horror

of drinking to excess: and yet the one naturally inclines men to the other. You seldom see a smoker who is not a drinker: and when young men get together to smoke and drink, evil generally comes of it."

Gilbert was not quite himself, and was therefore disposed to be ill-tempered. He felt angry at the other's free remarks, as people always do when they feel such remarks to be just; so he said,—

"I cannot imagine why you should all think so so much about drinking, and so on; it is much better to let people go on in their own way."

"Even if their own way lead them as it has led those who once made yonder Hall so pleasant?" asked Frederick.

Gilbert only replied by a strong puff at his cigar.

There was nothing in common between these two young men. Gilbert was only four years the senior, and Frederick had known him for years; but they had never been friends. Frederick was too honest and open-hearted for the cold and selfish nature of Gilbert Archer. Yet he did not wish to quarrel with him, for he had liked Marion almost as a sister ever since they had been children together; but the condition in which he now found Gilbert gave him much uneasiness; he dreaded that his family should see him; yet how could he prevent it? He resolved on one bold attempt just as they reached the wicket gate.

"You must have been wet to-day: had you not better go up to bed at once?" he said.

Gilbert threw away his now spent cigar, and turned angrily on him, saying, in a loud voice,—

"Really, you must think me a puny thing to want to be put to bed like a baby if I have got a little wetting. I think it is now not much past nine o'clock!"

The old church clock at that moment struck ten. They stood still to count the strokes.

"Well, they are not gone to bed yet, I suppose," said Gilbert, walking into the house, and without further ceremony advancing towards the drawing-

room. He was anxious to avoid the kiss with which he knew his Marion would greet him if he met her in the hall.

But she was too quick for him.

Her anxious ear had heard the opened gate and the steps on the gravel path, and now, ere Gilbert had got half way through the hall, she had thrown her arms round his neck and cried,—

“You are come at last : I am so glad !” Her gladness was gone the next moment, for before he had time to put her from him she had detected the horrid smell of spirits, and the angry manner in which he repulsed her causing her to look in his face, she knew all. She shrank back, and had not the wall been behind her she would have fallen. He passed on, and she sank into a chair.

Frederick had witnessed the brief interview, and now his heart ached for poor Marion ; but with instinctive delicacy, unwilling to intrude himself upon her in her sorrow, he quietly beckoned to Janet, who was the nearest to the door in the drawing-room, to come to her.

Janet was in an instant with her friend ; but poor Marion could not speak : she looked at her almost vacantly. Janet saw Frederick standing with a glass of water in his hand. She took it from him, and whispered,—

“Don’t tell any of them : I will take her upstairs.” Then kneeling down beside the afflicted one, and putting one arm tenderly round her, she said,—

“Drink this, darling—just a little, and then you shall come up to bed.”

It seemed to choke poor Marion, but she took a little, and then, looking at Janet with a less vacant air, attempted to rise. But she had no strength to walk, and Janet, strong as was her will, was a delicate creature.

Frederick was at hand, hidden from view, but ready to help ; and quickly advancing, he said,—

“Take my arm : lean as heavily as you like ;” and

with Janet's arm still round her waist, they contrived to lead her to her room. She tried to thank them, but seemed unable to articulate; and Frederick left them, after charging Janet to ring the bell if either of his sisters were wanted.

Janet's tears flowed fast as she laid her poor friend upon the sofa and knelt again beside her.

"I wish I could shed tears," at last broke from Marion; "I seem to feel nothing."

Alas! she felt only too deeply; and she lay on the couch, her ice-cold hand in Janet's, and her soft eyes looking straight before her, seeing nothing.

Janet prayed for her at last—besought the mercy that is never sought in vain by those who love their Saviour; and gradually the poor girl became less unnaturally calm, and soft tears rolled at length down her pale cheeks. She turned her head, and leaned it against Janet's bosom. "He never fails us nor forsakes us," she softly whispered.

"And He never will, darling, however deep may be the waters through which He sees fit to carry us," replied Janet, in the same tone.

A gentle tap was heard at the door, and in a moment Agnes entered the room.

She stooped, and, kissing poor Marion, said,—

"May we put you to bed, dearest one? It is better for you. Mamma sent me."

She let them do as they pleased, and ere long they had undressed her, and laid her in her bed.

"We will sit beside you and sing hymns to put you to sleep, as if you were a baby, Marion love," said Janet, soothingly. She looked at her.

"Where is he?" she said at last.

"Frederick is with him," answered Agnes: "he will not come yet—try to go to sleep, darling;" and they sat beside her, and first one, then the other, sang a hymn, the same soft low tune over and over again, as we soothe a suffering infant; till at length they had the comfort of hearing the gentle breathing that only comes with sleep.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE summer departed: the trees in the square garden now showed their sickly leaves, not of the bright golden hue we observe in the country, but of a dingy yellow brown, as if they were ready to fall before their time; and Marion's life seemed almost as sad as they. Sometimes indeed her husband would seem anxious to comfort her, and would come home sober, and at an early hour; but too often the watchful dweller on the lower floor had to open the door for him who could not manage to find the lock with his unsteady hand and double vision.

On these occasions, Gilbert, if he saw him at all, would glance savagely at him, and frequently afterwards Mr. Ramsay would hear his voice speaking harshly to the gentle wife, who never provoked him by word or look. It appeared that she never could please him. If she sat up, he was angry that she had not gone to bed; and if, in the hope of pleasing him, she had not done this, he was angry that she had not sat up.

Mr. Ramsay could not avoid hearing that angry voice in the stillness of the night, and he spoke of it one day to Mr. Lysons. But what was to be done? She was his wife, and it was not for them to attempt to draw her away from him: and through it all she loved him with all her warm true heart. She tried to make excuses for him, even to herself, and always sought to screen him from the observation of others.

Marion was not aware that Gilbert Archer was at this time suffering that nervous anguish which is with many constitutions the first stage of the drunkard's own malady, which made him suspicious and unjust, and drove him more madly than ever to seek the intoxicating cup.

Mr. Gregory, who had watched Archer more narrowly since he had become acquainted with young

Johnson, at length came to the conclusion that to allow a person of such a character to succeed him in his business was out of the question. Kind, however, as he always was, Mr. Gregory shrank from informing Gilbert of his change of plan, and resolved to defer the painful tidings till after Marion should be "well over her troubles," as the saying is.

But the conduct of Gilbert Archer himself brought upon him the news before Mr. Gregory had intended. A letter was written by a patient whom Archer had attended on the previous evening, complaining, in no measured terms, that the assistant did not know what he was doing; telling Mr. Gregory that the friends of the sick man had got him out of the house as well as they could, and sent for another surgeon who lived near, and with whose visits they intended for the future to be satisfied. Here was a patient lost to Mr. Gregory through the misconduct of his assistant. Anger got the better of him for the time. He came down to the surgery with the letter in his hand, read it aloud to Gilbert, and then angrily declared that this was the last day on which Archer should remain in his service.

"I have borne with you for your wife's sake," he added in his indignation; "I have hoped that out of regard for her you might take to more steady courses; but I see you are utterly lost, and the sooner you and I part the better."

Gilbert attempted to defend himself, to deny the charge as without foundation; but Mr. Gregory was too much enraged to listen to words which he was confident were false; and without thinking what might be the consequence of his acts, he immediately paid Gilbert Archer the arrears of his salary, and let him depart without a word.

And now, what was Gilbert to do?

He walked out into the street. It was past mid-day. Should he go home and tell his Marion the dreadful news? Should he tell her that the hopes of competency which he had held out to her had all

vanished away, that his character was gone, and he was a ruined man?

Go home, Gilbert Archer, and tell her all. Women are stronger than men to bear reverses; she will grieve indeed over the *cause* of your ruin, but that is now, alas! no new grief to her: tell her gently all, and see how tenderly, how patiently, how lovingly she will clasp her soft arms round your neck, and whisper words of patience and of hope.

Tell her the drink has ruined you, promise her to drink no more, and she will look poverty in the face without dismay, and will tell you she is happy now her husband is reclaimed. Go home—the tempter is at hand! Flee for your life to your loving home!

He is hesitating what to do. A rough hand is laid upon his arm, and he starts wildly. The coarse bloated face of Hector Johnson is turned towards him, and the leering eye fixes him with its evil power.

“Ha, ha! Archer! lucky to find you out this time o’ day! Come with me, man! There’s a fight, a jolly fight, going to be! I mustn’t tell you where, for fear of the bobbies! but come with me, we’re just in time.”

“No, no: let me go! I have business——”

“Not you: you’re idle to-day, I can see that; going home, perhaps, to make caudle——”

Gilbert writhed under his grasp; for all this while the heavy hand lay on his arm, and the coarse allusion sickened him at the moment. But Gilbert Archer was weak, infirm of purpose, and easily led astray: and the enemy saw his advantage.

“Come along: don’t keep here wasting time! Here’s a cab: jump in!” and the demented man let himself be pushed towards the cab, and entered it. Hector followed, and they drove off at a rapid pace. The cabman knew where to go, and the brutal sight was one congenial to his soul.

Johnson had a cigar in his mouth all the time; he now gave one to his companion, swearing at him while

he did so for looking so glum and unsociable; but adding,—

“We'll soon cheer you up: Jack Cripps has the best brandy within a mile.”

A fight! That horrid, horrid sight! What must the men be made of who look on, while two are mangling one another often to the death? Made of? Why, it a compound of gin and rum and brandy that those men are made of: aye, and the wretched women, too, who push their way in, and curse and swear, and laugh their hideous laugh, and cheer the athletic fools who are making so vile a use of the strength God gave them.

But we cannot stay here. The atmosphere is stifling, as if the bottomless pit were opened. We must leave Gilbert Archer there; and soon he will be willing to stay, and will drink more deeply than ever, to drown care.

That day Mr. Lysons had been very unwell. Yielding to his wife's entreaties, he had sent word to his pupils that he was unable to attend them, and by the middle of the day the fever attack increased so much that he was easily prevailed on to give way to it, and go to bed. It had now become a habit with Marion to spend a part of every morning on Mrs. Lysons' sofa; and now, when the sick man had retired, she promised to take charge of his little boy for the day; and great was the child's delight to hear that his dinner was to be eaten in his “pretty lady's” own drawing-room.

He was too young to be anxious at “poor papa's” being ill. Marion did her best to entertain the little one, or rather let him entertain her, for he chatted and ran about the room, and looked at all her pretty things, taking the greatest care not to hurt them; and she let him make what noise his little fingers liked upon her pianoforte, after she had sent him down to ask if Mr. Ramsay would dislike the noise.

Good Mr. Ramsay! If it had made him mad, he

would not have hindered a pleasure of the little child he loved so well: so he told Charlie it was pretty music, and Charlie quite agreed with him.

But over Marion's gentle spirit there hung a cloud that day. A dim presentiment of evil haunted her; this indeed was but natural, for her husband, as we have heard from the letter to Mr. Gregory, had been in a terrible condition when he returned home the night before: and he had latterly lost the power of sleeping, so that her nights were disturbed by his incessant restlessness. Yet she tried to be cheerful with her baby charge, though she felt glad when at last he was tired of play, and came creeping into her arms, begging her to tell him a "pretty story;" and her own heart was soothed while she told him the sweet story he had so often heard before, of the little ones who were brought to the dear Saviour, and taken up in His arms, and blessed by Him; for she felt that she too needed the tender care of that gracious Lord.

In the evening, when Mrs. Lysons came to seek her child, no Charlie was to be seen.

In reply to the mother's look of inquiry, Marion said, "He was tired of me, and ran down some time ago to Mr. Ramsay."

"I am sorry he left you; even his little prattle is better than your own thoughts, my poor child," said Mrs. Lysons, tenderly kissing her forehead.

"My thoughts are not all gloomy, dear friend," replied Marion; "I am beginning to feel so weary that I comfort myself with thinking of the better land, and longing to be there."

Mrs. Lysons looked gravely at her for a moment, and then said,—

"It is always well and always happy to think of our own heavenly home; but you must not give way to nervous apprehensions now: they are bad for you in your present state, my dear."

Marion answered, fondly pressing the kind hand that had taken hers,—

"I do not think it is nervous apprehension that gives me those thoughts; I am not thinking of *death*, but *life*—life for ever, and without sin or sorrow. I think of the dear ones who are gone before me, and of the blessed use they now see of the trials that here weighed them down so heavily. I compare the 'light affliction' with the 'weight of glory,' and feel cheered and happy."

Mrs. Lysons' feelings were indeed of a mixed nature on hearing these words. On the one hand, it rejoiced her heart to perceive how heavenly comfort was manifesting its power; and on the other, it struck her as terrible, that now, in the first year of her marriage, the conduct of her husband should cause such deep affliction, and that at this season, when she should have been full of joyful anticipations, her only comfort was in contemplating the time when all earthly things should cease for her! She stood gazing on the pale young face, and the soft patient look it had learnt to bear—though even while she gazed, she could perceive a sudden start, as an opening door was heard.

The entrance of little Charlie put an end to further converse; and after he had thrown his little arms round Marion for a kiss, and she had fondly blessed the child, his mother carried him off to his little bed, and Marion was again alone.

She had thought that Gilbert would be earlier home this evening, for he did not usually come home intoxicated on two successive nights, and she was wistfully looking for him now.

She rose and stirred the fire, to make a cheerful blaze—lighted the lamp, and set it on the table; and then began, slowly and wearily, to pace up and down the room.

Mrs. Lysons found her thus, when she came down again, and said,—

"I am so sorry my dear husband is ill, dear Marion, for I cannot bear to leave you alone, and yet——"

"Not for worlds would I keep you from your dear good husband!" cried Marion, quickly; "it is bad enough for him to be confined to his bed; but he would be miserable if you were not with him. Go back to him now, dear Mrs. Lysons; perhaps Gilbert will be in soon."

"I trust he may," said Mrs. Lysons. "And meanwhile, dear Marion, try to play a little on your pretty piano. It is better than pacing the room."

"I will try," said Marion, wearily.

"Do, for a little while; and then I will come down again."

And the kind woman ran softly up the stairs to her sick husband.

Nine—ten, were struck by the great church clock; and no Gilbert yet.

Alas! poor Marion: she little knows where he is—she knows not of the existence of such places; but she knows too well how he will be when he returns.

Mrs. Lysons came down once more to entreat her to go to bed.

"You are tired, and will make yourself ill if you stay up so late: try to go to sleep, will you not, dear one?"

She suffered herself to be persuaded; and bidding her kind friend good night, after making up the fire, she retired to her bedroom.

In the agitation of her mind, she could not read, not even from the blessed Book; she could scarcely even pray connectedly, so she was soon laid down on her lonely bed.

An hour after, Mrs. Lysons crept softy into the room. Sleep had been merciful to the sorrowing one, and she was in the land of dreams. A tear was yet undried upon her cheek, yet a soft flush had taken the place of its paleness, and the lovely mouth was slightly parted with a sweet smile—a smile of gladness. Yes, in her dream, her child was lying in her arms, and her husband standing by, rejoicing over his babe. All recollection of his cruel sin was gone; he

was the Gilbert of her early love, gazing on his first-born. The soft fair hair was spread over the pillow, and the whole look was one of exquisite beauty.

The watchful friend stood gazing at her in wonder—how different from the broken-hearted wife she had parted with but an hour before! She rejoiced, indeed, to see the change: she thought if Gilbert Archer could see that lovely countenance, with its sweet look of joy, he could never, never bear to sin against her more. But then, with a sickening feeling, she remembered that when he should come in, his vision would be disturbed, his perceptions dimmed, and he would be unable to appreciate what was so beautiful in her eyes.

Softly she left the room, lest she should, by her presence, bring back the sweet sleeper to this weary world again.

CHAPTER XXII.

HOURS passed away. Mrs. Lysons still kept watch beside her husband. He was sleeping quietly, and had no need of her care, but some unaccountable feeling kept her there: she felt as if she could not go to rest till Gilbert Archer should come home, and all be still.

Mr. Ramsay, too, as the time went on, began to watch more anxiously for the unsteady effort to unlock the door.

At length, to his surprise, he heard it softly and steadily opened; and a feeling of relief came over him, with the idea that for this once Gilbert had been engaged with a patient, and that he had come home sober. He had not heard the firm tread of a policeman, who passed the door just as Gilbert arrived at it, and who, seeing his condition, had quietly taken the key from his hand, and turned the

lock without noise; so Mr. Ramsay began to prepare for the repose he greatly needed.

Gilbert's unsteady step, however, made him pause; and he looked out on the staircase just in time to see that he had, with difficulty, reached the landing, when, with a groan, Mr. Ramsay returned to his own room.

Archer staggered to the drawing-room, as if expecting to find his wife waiting for him—then he went into the bedroom.

Poor careful Marion had left a lamp burning for him on the landing, and in the bedroom was an unshaded night-light. But the fire, of course, had long since burnt itself out.

The night was wet and cold, and the drunken man felt chilly. He went up rudely to the bedside, and shook the shoulder of the sleeper, growling out,—

"What have you let the fire out for?—just to give me my death of cold? Get up and light it, can't ye?"

"Dearest one, don't shake me, I will get up," said poor Marion, wide awake in a moment. "Don't touch me, please, Gilbert!" and she was out of bed as she spoke. She tottered across the room towards the fireplace.

What was that sudden shriek? One scream, so piercing that the neighbours heard it, and then a heavy fall.

All in the house were alarmed.

Mrs. Lysons was first in the room, and what met her gaze? Marion lay on the floor insensible; and, cowering against the wall, his dull eyes fixed upon her deathlike face, was the wretched husband.

"He has killed her!" shrieked Mrs. Lysons, as the landlady and Nurse Goldie rushed into the room.

"Send for a doctor, quick!" cried the nurse, and in a moment Mr. Ramsay, who had run upstairs,

was in the street hurrying madly for the nearest surgeon.

The women bent over the senseless form; the eyes stared wildly, but there was no vision in them.

"Can we lift her on the bed?" whispered Mrs. Lysons; and with the strength which terrible excitement gives, they gently raised her, and placed her on her bed.

As they did this, one of them felt her hand become wet, and a glance showed them that it was soiled from contact with the nightdress. Gently they turned her dress a little, and there was the mark of a muddy boot against the back!

Not a word was spoken: the horror struck all dumb. A low faint moan escaped the injured woman.

"She lives! Oh, where is the doctor?" cried Mrs. Lysons.

Moments seemed hours as they waited there, and yet the surgeon was quick in coming.

A policeman followed him, called by Mr. Ramsay.

"Take away that man!" was the surgeon's first word, and then for the first time they noticed the guilty wretch, who had never moved, except to tremble, since they entered the room. If anything could have sobered him, Gilbert Archer was sober now; but his eyes glared frightfully, and he was scarcely able to stagger out of the apartment.

But now all the care of the attendant women was needed, though one or two faint moans alone showed that poor Marion lived.

Another life was just begun.

An infant's feeble wail claimed their protecting care; and soon the helpless babe was tenderly held to Nurse Goldie's bosom, while with streaming eyes she watched beside the bed.

Mrs. Lysons held the cold still hand. There was no movement, no consciousness in the young mother; the pulse became lower and lower; no human skill,

no human love, could retain that life which was ebbing fast away.

A physician had been hastily summoned; but he could only look the horror he really felt, and whisper to the surgeon,—

“Some internal injury.”

“He kicked her!” cried Nurse Goldie at these words; and she showed the stain on the nightdress.

Poor Mrs. Lysons felt that it was mercy that she could not awake to the consciousness that her husband’s deed had murdered her.

Still they stood around, gently administering, drop by drop, what might perhaps restore the vital power. But all in vain; the breathing became stiller and more still, and at last it was only by stooping close to the pale face that it could be perceived at all. At length one gentle sigh, and they knew the spirit was gone.

Holding their own breath, they waited, as if the forsaken clay could move again.

Even the surgeon wiped his eyes as he let go the wrist he had been holding, counting the failing pulse.

“Poor thing!” he whispered; “poor murdered one! Take care of the child, nurse: it may live.”

He looked at the poor little one: that cry which newly made mothers so rejoice to hear, seemed in the ears of those who listened there as a wail for the dead.

The tender nurse bore it away, and washed and dressed and soothed the orphan babe, though her eyes were dimmed with tears, and her trembling hands could scarcely do their office. Then wrapping it up carefully, she laid it to sleep on the sofa, and hastened back to the chamber of death.

Mrs. Lysons was lying on the bed, sobbing violently. Nurse took her hand.

“Dear lady, don’t give way; remember your dear husband and child—do not make yourself ill.”

She rose. "It has relieved me, nurse: I am better now."

"Go, then, dear lady: leave me and Mrs. Ellis here. Go to your husband."

The faithful friend dared not trust herself to look again at the loved face of the dead. On the landing she found Mr. Ramsay, pale as death; he took her hand wildly, and said,—

"Has she no friends? Ought we not to telegraph to them?"

This was a new thought to the distracted woman.

"Come in here," she said, and hastened to her own sitting-room, for she felt unable to stand. Then she continued hurriedly,—

"Oh, yes, her friends at Holmdale ought to know."

"Give me the address: I will take it to the office."

She pressed her hand to her forehead.

"There are the Oakleys, and her dear friend Janet. Perhaps she had better hear it first—Miss Hastings: will you send to her?"

He started as with a sudden pang, then asked,—

"Do you know the name of her house?"

"No, she lives with her father: they must be well known. Janet Hastings is her name."

"May I write the telegram here? That wretched man is in my room below."

She pointed to the writing-table.

"Better say seriously ill—the truth is too dreadful at once—she will come directly. But stay; oh, think for me, Mr. Ramsay!" exclaimed the poor woman in her anguish. "I know not what is for the best. Ought she not to be told all? suspense is so dreadful."

"It is all dreadful," he replied; "but I think we had better tell the worst." And with trembling hands he wrote the document which was to cause such heartfelt sorrow; and in his distress he almost forgot to add "the infant lives." Then hastening to

the telegraph office, he waited to see the dreadful missive sent on its way.

The worst part of all—the fact of this death being caused by a husband's hand—was yet to be told.

And where was the wretched man all this time? At the moment of his being led from the presence of his wife, Gilbert Archer had been thoroughly prostrated. A policeman was with him, and Mr. Ellis also chose to watch him till the result of his crime should be known. He sat shivering beside the fire, in Mr. Ramsay's room—shivering, but not with cold; and his mutterings were unceasing.

"Who says I kicked her? Who says it was my doing? Why does she shriek so? Why does she go on shrieking? Why can't she be quiet? Stop her—stop her! it is dreadful, all this shrieking! Why won't you silence her?"

"It is your own conscience that hears the shrieks," at length answered the policeman; "you've quieted her once for all: you'll never hear *her* shriek again."

"I hear her now: she never stops. And what is that? A child crying, too? Why does she shriek so?"

And the miserable man looked round in terror; then starting up, exclaimed,—

"Ah, she is there—running about shrieking! Take her away—quiet her!"

The two men, with difficulty, forced him upon his chair again.

When all was over, the surgeon entered the room.

"You may take him away now, policeman, on a charge of murder—the wife is dead."

"Dead—dead!" shrieked Gilbert. "She is not dead: she is screaming still!"

No one answered him; but the surgeon, addressing the policeman, said,—

"You must take him in a cab: he is not fit to walk; this is delirium tremens. I will call a cab for you."

The policeman looked aghast.

"And please, sir, send in another man; I don't like to undertake him alone."

And the wretched man, a maniac now, was soon in a cab, conveyed away to prison. One more of the many husbands whose love for drink has made them murderers.

Shall we follow the telegram with its fearful tidings? We cannot describe the anguish that it caused. Though the most fearful part was withheld, yet to hear that Marion was dead, that the sweet hopes of a mother had ended thus, struck the deepest dismay into the hearts of Janet Hastings and her father.

Sending on the fatal paper to the rectory, Janet prepared to set off by the earliest train. She had long been ready for a cheerful summons, and had little now to do.

But ere the time for the train arrived, the dreadful news had spread through Holmdale, and Dr. Mortimer was soon at the cottage of Mr. Hastings.

The deadly pale face of Janet met his eye; but she gave him her hand without speaking, and he knew that words of comfort would be but cruel then; so he inquired whether she was going to London alone? Her father answered in the affirmative.

"I will go with you!" cried the kind-hearted man; "I may be of some little use: at all events, you will not be alone."

The journey was almost a silent one. The terrible words of the telegram were sometimes read over and commented on, till both felt convinced that there was more to tell than had been conveyed in those few words; and painful surmises arose, though the whole awful truth could never occur to them.

At length they reached London. A gentleman was standing on the platform anxiously watching the carriages; and as Dr. Mortimer helped his companion to alight, he came up to them.

"Miss Hastings—am I not right? Is it not Miss Hastings?"

Janet turned her wondering eyes upon the stranger.

It was Mr. Ramsay. Pale as death he looked, as he said,—

"I have a carriage ready: you are come in answer to our telegram?"

A deadly sickness came over Janet; and she leaned heavily on Dr. Mortimer.

"Bear up a little longer," said he, gently and tenderly as a brother; "we shall soon know the worst now."

He put her into the carriage, the door of which was held open by Mr. Ramsay, then, before entering it himself, Dr. Mortimer said,—

"You are coming with us, sir?"

"I will mount the box," was his answer.

"Oh, no! If, as I believe, you were a friend of—if it is you who sent the telegram, Mr. Lysons, pray come in."

"The telegram was in the name of Mr. Lysons, as I thought it would be more familiar to Miss Hastings than my own. My name is Ramsay."

However, he entered the carriage; and during the drive, contrived to let the truth come gradually out, fearful lest some hasty words of the landlady or the servant might inform them of it too suddenly.

But how can such horrors be gradually told? They always come suddenly, let what care soever be taken—the truth flashes on us like a thunder-clap. It was so now with Janet; and it required all the self-command, learned in years of trial, to enable her to sit quietly to hear how her beloved friend had died.

The agitation of Mr. Ramsay in narrating the circumstances was extreme; and as soon as he had brought the travellers to the house, and led them up to Mrs. Lysons' room, he hurriedly sought his own.

Beside the fire, sat Nurse Goldie; and in her arms, the orphan babe. No one else was there but little Charlie.

Nurse sent the child to call his mother down, while Dr. Mortimer, gently placing Janet on the sofa, said, "Lie still a while"

But he had hardly spoken ere he saw that she had fainted.

She had borne up till now, but the necessity for exertion over, she could bear up no more. Water was quickly procured, and her temples bathed by the kind doctor and Mrs. Lysons, and Janet was soon herself again.

"I will leave you now for a while," said the doctor; but he looked at Nurse Goldie as he spoke. She laid the infant on a pillow, and followed him from the room.

"Would you like to see her, sir? All trace of pain is gone." And she unlocked the door of the chamber of death.

All trace of pain was indeed gone. You might have thought she slept, and would soon awake to smile on you: but that frame will wake no more till the great trumpet sounds.

"Did Mr. Ramsay tell you how it was done, sir?" inquired Mrs. Goldie, in a whisper.

"He said her husband did it."

"It was a *kick*, sir! a kick from his drunken, cowardly foot! The mark, the shape of his boot, is on that dear back now, just in the place where it was most dangerous."

Dr. Mortimer stood gazing on the murdered Marion.

Her beautiful hair, combed carefully from the face, lay in its rich curls upon the pillow; the arms were crossed upon the breast: one might almost fancy that it heaved, so tranquilly she lay. The big tears rolled unheeded down the cheeks of the strong man; for none who ever knew Marion could help loving her, and he had known her almost from infancy.

"Sweet lamb!" said Nurse Goldie, gently laying her hand on the pale forehead; "it is well she is gone. A drunken husband's a curse—none know but his wife the extent of the misery; but I have heard enough of his goings on in this house to make me

feel it is well her troubles are over. What a brute a man must be to ill use such an angel!"

"A drunkard is worse than a brute," replied the doctor; "the brutes are what God made them; but a man who drinks away his senses is a demon!"

They left the room again noiselessly, and, at his request, the good nurse showed Dr. Mortimer into poor Marion's drawing-room, there to wait till Janet should inquire for him, or his services be needed in any way.

"I wish the inquest had been over, sir, before she came; but I hope she will not know it is going on. It is to take place in an hour from this."

The doctor shuddered. An inquest! That sweet dead face to be gazed at by twelve strangers! It seemed a profanation; but it was but a portion of the dismal whole.

"I shall be called, sir, and so will poor Mrs. Lysons, and every one who was in this house. May I ask you to be so kind as to keep Miss Hastings in the sitting-room? The poor baby will sleep, I think." And the doctor promised to be ready for the mournful task.

He heard Mrs. Lysons take Janet to the door of the room and leave her there alone—no stranger's eye, even so kind a one as Mrs. Lysons, must witness poor Janet's visit to all that was left on earth of Marion; and long it was before she came out again.

The time for the inquest was drawing near, and at a summons from Mrs. Lysons, Dr. Mortimer again entered her sitting-room, and remained with Janet.

Charlie was with his father. He had been told his "pretty lady" was gone to heaven; but his infant mind could not receive the idea of anything to lament. He grieved that he should not see her again; but the distress manifested by both his parents surprised him much: and his delight at the tiny baby in Nurse Goldie's arms quite made up at the moment for the loss of his kind friend and play-fellow. Who has not felt the discordant pang which

is caused by the lively prattle of a little child in the house of death?

The dreaded inquest was over, and a verdict of "Wilful murder" returned against Gilbert Archer.

Yes; he who, one short year before, had sworn to love and cherish his priceless jewel, has now her blood upon his head, because, dearly as he loved his wife, he loved drink more.

CHAPTER XXIII.

WHEN he saw that his presence was no longer needed, Dr. Mortimer sought the apartments of Mr. Ramsay, and knocked gently at his door. No answer being given, he opened it softly, to ascertain if the inmate were absent; but he hurriedly withdrew, not wishing to intrude upon the emotion he there witnessed.

Mr. Ramsay was on his knees, his head buried in his hands; and sobs, strong and loud, burst from him.

Dr. Mortimer felt grieved at having opened the door, and retired quickly; but not before Mr. Ramsay was aware of his presence.

He started up.

"Forgive me!" he cried; "do not go! let me help all I can!" And giving the doctor a chair—it was the very chair on which the drunken murderer had sat that dreadful morning—he began to speak. He inquired for Miss Hastings; how she bore all—and Dr. Mortimer was warm in her praise.

"Miss Hastings is a Christian," he said; "she has known sorrow, and come out of it as gold seven times refined: and even in this first hour of distress she bows submissively to the hand of God."

"Ah," said Mr. Ramsay, "if one could but see that hand! But I can see nothing yet but the insane wickedness of a drunkard!"

"I am not a good preacher, Mr. Ramsay," said

Dr. Mortimer; "I must get Miss Hastings to explain my meaning to you. She has been talking to me about God's permitting even this cruel act, in wisdom and love. I am afraid I am not like her; but I can perceive and admire the beauty of her religious belief."

Mr. Ramsay sighed—a heavy long-drawn sigh; and soon began to consult with Dr. Mortimer about the funeral.

"I think they will like to lay her beside her grandmother in our churchyard," said the doctor; "but this I will ascertain from Miss Hastings—it is a mere matter of feeling."

They sat there together for some time, talking quietly or altogether silent, till Dr. Mortimer recollected he ought to go. He had discovered, in the course of conversation, with what great horror his new acquaintance looked on drink, and his heart warmed to him in consequence.

On his return upstairs he found the poor infant in Janet's arms.

"This is my child, Dr. Mortimer!" she said, softly.

"It must be the child of us all!" he exclaimed, warmly; "alone as it is in the world, we must all consider it our own."

"But I must keep it—it must go home with me!"

"It shall indeed," he replied: "poor innocent! let me look at it!"

She turned its face towards him.

"God grant it a happier fate than its poor mother's!" he exclaimed; and he turned away quickly.

Dr. Mortimer soon ascertained that it was Janet's desire to lay the loved form in their own quiet churchyard, and he readily undertook the necessary arrangements, saying that Mr. Ramsay would assist him.

The worthy man determined that all expense of his journey should be at his own cost; and he told

Janet so, knowing well that her income was only sufficient for her own and her father's wants.

"You must not grudge me this gratification, Miss Hastings," he said; "I have neither wife nor child to spend for. And you must allow me also to engage good Mrs. Goldie to take charge of the child for the present—you are not equal to the fatigue, even if you had time to give to it."

"You are too kind!" was all poor Janet could say, for she knew full well that she could not afford to pay a nurse for her helpless charge; and Dr. Mortimer was thankful to be able thus to show his affection for her who was gone, and his respect for the excellent Janet.

That evening Mr. Lysons was coming down to his room for a while, and Janet, with her kind friend, agreed to sit in poor Marion's drawing-room, that they might not disturb the sick man.

Nurse Goldie, with the poor babe, kept them company.

It was well for Janet that she had the babe to think of, for it assisted her in her endeavours to bear up under her heavy sorrow.

When he had established her in the forsaken room, Dr. Mortimer again sought Mr. Ramsay, in order to make the necessary preparations for the melancholy journey of the following day. There was no need for Janet to remain longer in town—he knew she would be glad to be again with her father; and this he said to Mr. Ramsay.

"Has she a father living, then?" inquired the latter.

"As good a man as ever breathed," said the energetic doctor, "and with an angel for a daughter."

Mr. Ramsay seemed for a moment to be struggling with strong emotion, but then he said,—

"Am I impertinent? is it too much to ask? but may I inquire if you are engaged to this excellent lady?"

Dr. Mortimer was surprised.

"No," he said, "certainly not. I admire and venerate her, but I should not dare make love to her. I came with her now because her father is too infirm to travel, and her only other male friend, our excellent rector, could not have left his parish. I am their medical man."

Mr. Ramsay thanked him for his frankness, and again apologized for the question.

They then went out together to make arrangements for conveying the body of the murdered wife to the home of her youth.

On their return, Dr. Mortimer rejoined Miss Hastings, while Mr. Ramsay, at Mr. Lysons' request, went up to pass a little time with him in his sitting-room.

Nurse Goldie soon afterwards took away the infant to her own bedroom, and the doctor and Janet were left alone.

He began to speak in praise of their new acquaintance, Mr. Ramsay. He told her how he had watched night after night to open the door for the wretched Archer, and what efforts he had made to bring him to a better mind.

"Oh, why—why did not she tell us all this!" exclaimed poor Janet; "we might have interfered to save her."

"I know not what we could have done," was his reply; "she was his wife, and to separate husband and wife is no easy matter. She was devotedly attached to him through all his faults."

"She was indeed. Dr. Mortimer, I never could think well of that man, I never could like him; I saw his tendency for drink, and warned her of it."

"Ah! and your warning was lost! And now, how terribly verified! Depend upon it, Miss Hastings, a woman who marries a man when she has the slightest idea that he is ever the worse for drink ensures misery to herself, though she may not always come to so fearful an end."

"I know it—none ever knew it better," replied

Janet, with a shudder. She stopped, and seemed debating with herself; at length she said,—

“Dr. Mortimer, you are a friend I value highly: may I ask you a question which will let you into my life’s deepest secret?”

He sat down near her with a look of deep attention, and she continued,—

“Can you tell me, if you have any reason to know the real name of the gentleman who calls himself Mr. Ramsay?” And her face was pale, while her lips quivered.

“Is his name not Ramsay?” said the doctor in surprise. “He has not hinted at such a thing to me. Do you know him, Miss Hastings?”

“Have you heard his Christian name?” she asked, in a low voice.

“I saw it on an envelope on his table: it is Edgar.”

Janet held one hand tightly at her side, as if to keep her heart from bursting its bounds, and said,—

“Fifteen years ago, that man was to have been my husband: he drank himself into ruin, and my kind father saved me from him.”

“Did he recognize you now?” asked the doctor.

“I know not: there was cause enough for his agitation without that,” she replied; “but the instant I heard his voice, I knew him.”

The doctor rose, and paced up and down the room.

“What is his real name?”

“Edgar Russell,” she said, with difficulty uttering the once familiar name.

“You say he was a drunkard. All that must long since be past. He declared to me that for years no spirit or wine of any kind has passed his lips; and I am sure by his way of speaking of—that miserable wretch—that his horror of drink is sincere. He appears to me to be a very religious man.”

“Dearest Marion talked of him as being a most serious and high-principled person; but I had no clue then to connect Mr. Ramsay with poor Edgar.”

The doctor was agitated.

"Miss Hastings, you must see him," he said.

"See him? Oh, no: the past is past."

"Let it be past," exclaimed the kind-hearted man; "and let a brighter future dawn!"

He took her hand with a brother's freedom: "Forgive me, Janet, but tell me, have you ever loved another?"

Her face was averted, as she replied,—

"Never, never."

"I knew it," he said. "And now that he is worthy of you, why not forget the past?"

She paused a moment, and then said more calmly,—

"This is not the time, Dr. Mortimer, to think of these things. I am thankful—oh, how deeply thankful!—to find that my prayers for my poor erring Edgar have been thus answered; but in the first moments of this dreadful trouble, I cannot bear to think of him. My duty is to my father, and my poor motherless babe."

The good doctor would not pursue the subject, but continued pacing the room. He recollected the question with which Mr. Ramsay had startled him, and his look of relief when he had declared there was no engagement between himself and Janet; but this was not to be told by *him*, so he let the matter rest for the present.

After a while Mrs. Lysons came into the room. "My husband would so like to see you for a little time, Miss Hastings," she said; "he has heard so much of you from—" she could not utter the name of her whom she loved almost as tenderly as did Janet herself—"and he probably will not have left his room before you go in the morning."

She took Janet's hand as she spoke, and led her into the room. Mr. Lysons was sitting by the fire, but he rose on her entrance, and greeted her with a kindly but silent pressure of the hand: and it was some moments before either of the three could speak.

Oh, it is sad to lose those we love, when the hand of God has stricken them; but now, when she whom they mourned had met her untimely death in so dreadful a manner, the anguish of the loss was increased a thousandfold!

But we must dwell here no longer. Suffice it to say that on the morrow Janet took leave of these friends whose love for Marion had won her affection in a moment; and with her unconscious charge, under the care of Nurse Goldie, and her kind protector, returned to her home.

We will not attempt to paint the meeting between her and the Oakley family, nor the agony with which they kissed the tiny babe, all that was left them of their beloved Marion. We must leave them in the homes which had till lately been so happy, and over which the demon Drink had cast so terrible a cloud, and follow the murderer to his cell.

We have not much to tell of him. He has fallen into the lowest depths, and has committed the most fearful crime; he has outraged the plainest laws of nature, as well as of God; and now he lies upon his prison-bed, still calling on the gaoler to stifle the screams which shall never leave his inflamed brain while life is left him, and which he fancies are the shrieks of her he lately loved so well.

They are about to try him for the wilful murder of his wife, and the plea that will be set up for him is that, in a fit of delirium tremens, he was not conscious of his actions.

What! does one crime extenuate the guilt of another?

Because this man had debased his intellect below the brutes by his own voluntary yielding to his love for intoxicating drinks, is that to be held as an excuse for the crime of murder?

But when the order was given for the prisoner to be brought up for his trial, the tidings were brought into the court that active inflammation of the brain had terminated the earthly career of the murderer.

Surely *his* too was the grave of a suicide?

And shall we say this is a rare case—that thousands and tens of thousands of our countrymen are drunk every day, and yet no serious mischief follows?

Let the police reports—let our assizes answer.

* * * * *

How terrible a text had Mr. Oakley for his oration to his people on the next Christmas day, when, though the loving hearts of all his family had been bowed down, so that to them the feast required a painful effort, yet he again assembled the poor in his barn, to enjoy a sober Christmas dinner! But some of them *did* lay it to heart; and there is every reason to hope, that, although the “White Lion,” backed by the patronage of Sir Reginald Firewater, still holds up his gaudy head, yet that the sign will soon be taken down from the “Anchor,” and the landlord forced to migrate to some other village. Oh, that he would turn to an honest trade, one that saves men’s lives instead of destroying them!

The summer following, Mr. and Mrs. Lysons, with their little boy, paid a long visit to Holmdale Rectory, while Mr. Ramsay came, invited by Dr. Mortimer, to visit him.

And the kindly efforts of the doctor were rewarded. The long sad tale of Edgar Russell’s crimes, of his affliction, his deep repentance, his resolute amendment, his strength derived by faith from on high, was told by him to Janet and her father. He said how, ashamed to bear his own, he had taken his mother’s name at the beginning of his reformation, because—and here he touched a chord that every mother’s heart can feel—he knew his mother’s love had followed him through all his degradation, and that, though she was no longer on earth, she would not grudge him her name.

And thus, snatched by merciful affliction from the depths into which he had fallen, and able now to lift up his head among his equals, Edgar Russell won at

last the prize he had forfeited long ago, and now aids his constantly loved Janet in her tender care of her failing parent.

But who shall limit the fell effects of drunkenness? Alas, it follows on to children, and children's children!

The orphaned babe grew and appeared to thrive; its soft blue eyes were the colour of its mother's, the skin and hair as fair; but no beam of intelligence ever answered the loving looks of nurse or friends. The soft eyes gazed on vacancy; the tongue attempted not to utter a sound; and by degrees the dreadful truth became too evident to them all, that the same fatal blow which had caused the death of the mother, had dimmed for ever the powers of perception in her unhappy offspring. The infant Marion was an idiot!

The intoxicating cup had indeed "bitten like a serpent, and stung as an adder."

THE END.



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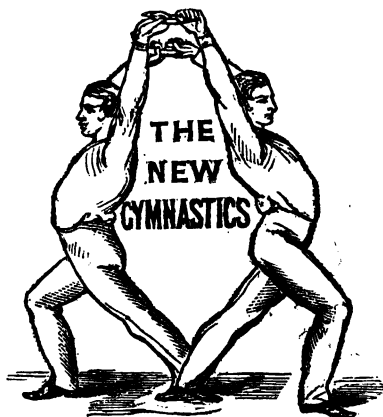
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